Civic Engagement
QEP Proposal

I. Proposal Description - Civic Engagement
The term “civic engagement” is both complex and viewed somewhat suspiciously within academics. No single definition exists that is widely accepted, although many schools use the term in promotional materials and imply that a common definition exists. There appears to be a variety of terms that are often used interchangeably: civic engagement, community engagement, civic learning, and service-learning are the most popular. Service-learning has a distinct history as a pedagogy, and would seem to be an important aspect of civic engagement, but examining university websites finds that many schools refer to civic engagement but what they are offering is solely service-learning.

Linked with the concept of civic engagement are three other broad ideas. The first is that universities that are civically engaged will produce graduates who are more informed and active as citizens. Close related to this is the second concept, that civic engagement is directly connected to educating students to be active participants in our democratic society. All of these are superseded by the third idea, that civic engagement, informed citizens, and participants in a democratic society are all invested in striving for the common or public good. Each of these terms – civic engagement, democratic society, citizens, and public or common good – are fraught with definitional difficulties (see, for example, Brabant & Braid, 2009).

In 2001, the American Association of Higher Education identified four distinct aspects of civic engagement that enrich students’ college experience:
1. Civic engagement is active participation in the development and utilization of knowledge for the improvement of society, using talents and wisdom for the greater good
2. Civic engagement is active involvement as a contributing member of society, viewing social problems as involving and connecting to one’s own life
3. Civic engagement is the duty to be informed and active in the life of a democratic society and its governance
4. Civic engagement is the responsibility of each citizen to understand his or her role and contribution in facilitating a working democracy, seeking common ground that achieves actions that benefit the common good

Tufts University has identified three over-lapping domains of civic engagement. These domains include the following:
• The social service realm, where students become more knowledgeable about social problems and actively participate in providing services to alleviate or eliminate them
• The social advocacy realm, where students raise public awareness and work to change societal conditions that lead to social problems and injustices
• The political realm, where students participate in campaigns to elect candidates for office that reflect their values and ideals for shaping the public good
After consideration, it appears that a fourth domain could be added:

- The business realm, where students learn the importance of entrepreneurship and civically engaged business practices as important contributing factors to the health of communities.

Elon University defines civic engagement as “the process of learning about the assets, needs, and concerns of the larger communities of which we are a part and the willingness to collaborate with others to help define and achieve the common good. This theme is central to the Elon University mission of preparing civically engaged graduates who are ‘global citizens and informed leaders motivated by a concern for the common good.’ As a university, we emphasize our responsibility to live in community, acknowledging our interdependency with others.” (Elon University Civic Engagement website, 2011). This definition reflects the university mission statement, which states in part “We integrate learning across the disciplines and put knowledge into practice, thus preparing students to be global citizens and informed leaders motivated by concern for the common good.” (Elon University Mission Statement, 2011). Elon’s commitment to civic engagement is further reflected in the university’s strategic plan, The Elon Commitment, especially the section that focuses on developing “an unprecedented university commitment to diversity and global engagement”. This section states,

Strong civic engagement and service learning programs are the hallmark of an Elon education. We will partner with local, regional, national and global communities to create innovative solutions to society’s most pressing problems at home and around the world. (The Elon Commitment, 2011)

Clearly, the development of students who will become the civically-engaged leaders of our communities is an important theme of an Elon education. The focus of this QEP is to transform Elon from a university that does civic engagement into a civically engaged university, utilizing the strengths of all of our many constituencies – faculty, staff, administrators, community partners, alumni, parents and students. By transforming the university, student learning will also be transformed.

II. Civic Engagement Goals

There are three goals of this QEP proposal.

Goal 1. Students will develop a deeper understanding of the Burlington/Alamance County region, its history and current challenges.

Goal 2. Students will develop a deeper understanding of how issues in Burlington/Alamance County connect to or reflect broader regional and global issues and challenges.

Goal 3. Students’ involvement in local, regional, and global issues and challenges will increase through an improved infrastructure to coordinate and promote curricular and co-curricular civic engagement activities and through providing more opportunities for students to practice civic engagement, resulting in students who are

- better able to articulate the complexities of issues,
better able to think of innovative solutions to problems,
better prepared to implement innovative solutions,
better able to reflect on and to articulate their role as citizens working for the public good.

Rationale
Goal 1. Students will develop a deeper understanding of the Burlington/Alamance County region, its history and current challenges. C.Wright Mills wrote of “personal troubles and social issues”, noting that many people experience their own concerns without understanding them in a broader context. The focus of this goal is to help create for students an intellectual understanding of the forces that have lead to the creation of a “typical” U.S. town, Burlington, North Carolina, and the surrounding area, Alamance County.

There is no systematic approach currently in place to provide such an understanding to students. By helping them understand this place in context, they can begin to evaluate their own cities of residence. To be a good citizen means that one comprehends the issues one faces.

To provide this understanding, all first year students will be required to attend a series of four (4) lectures during the fall semester of their first year. These lectures, delivered by either Elon faculty members or local experts, or a combination of both, would provide students with a beginning understanding of important topics in the Burlington area. Topics might include:

- Economic development of the region, with an emphasis on the textile industry
- A history of race and ethnic relations and power inequities in the area
- The development of water and land use, including such topics as the Lake Jordan Rules
- The political/governmental structures of the city and county, and challenges that are facing these entities
- Immigration patterns, both past and present
- The role Elon University has in the development of the region
- Provision of services, such as education, health care, and basic social services

These lectures could be delivered in a variety of ways, but the key is that all first-year students hear the same basic information to help them better understand the area in which they are living while students at Elon.

Goal 2. Students will develop a deeper understanding of how issues in Burlington/Alamance County connect to or reflect broader regional and global issues and challenges. Building on the material from their first year, students will be required to attend a second series of four (4) lectures during the fall semester of their sophomore year. These lectures will focus on global issues that reflect, to some degree, the topics discussed in the first year lecture series. Power inequities, diversity, ecological challenges, immigration issues, social service issues such as poverty and homelessness, all might be addressed. The key difference here is that the issues are examined in the context of another country or globally. The purpose of this lecture series is to help students connect how issues are often similar, whether expressed as local problems or as challenges in other countries or as issues that face us as members of a global community.
The lectures/conversations could be delivered by Elon faculty members or by invited speakers. Again, the lectures could be delivered in a variety of ways, but the key is still to provide all second-year students with the same information. One exciting possibility is the use of Skype to bring in voices from other parts of the globe, personalizing the material in ways that can’t be done by just speaking about rather than from a place. Another possibility is to open this lecture series to the surrounding community.

Goal 3. Students’ involvement in local, regional, and global issues and challenges will increase through an improved infrastructure to coordinate and promote curricular and co-curricular civic engagement activities and through providing more opportunities for students to practice civic engagement. While the first two goals are more about acquiring knowledge, this goal is aimed at promoting student action. This goal builds on the Elon University tradition of engaged, experiential learning. There are a number of strategies that will be used to attain this goal.

A. The creation of the Elon University Center for Civic Engagement. Elon University has been a leader in developing and implementing significant programs for students to become active participants in their learning and civic engagement. Some of these include the Kernodle Center for Service-Learning and Community Engagement, Project Pericles, the Elon Academy, the Center for Leadership, the National Campaign for Student Political and Civic Scholars, the Civic Engagement Scholars program, the Elon Student Government Association, and many others. What is missing is the ability to bring together, coordinate, and maximize the synergistic potential of these groups. What is needed is a way to combat “silo-ization”.

The Center for Civic Engagement would 1) facilitate communication and coordination among and between the various civic engagement programs at Elon, with special attention given to more intentionally weave together undergraduate and graduate programs, 2) initiate new programs that would link the various constituencies (alumni, community partners, etc.) with current students, 3) seek external funding for all programs, and 4) develop and oversee the lecture program, the Training for Trusteeship grants, the East Burlington Center, service sabbaticals, and any other programs designed to increase student civic engagement. Staffing would initially require an administrator and an administrative assistant (modeled after the existing CATL structure).

B. The creation of The East Burlington Resource Center. Not a new idea, the concept of having an Elon presence in east Burlington has been examined in various forms for the past five years. The Center would provide a visible presence for Elon in the local community, and would provide opportunities for students to

- Be involved in community-based research
- Be involved in social and business entrepreneurship
- Meet with local constituencies who might be reluctant to come to the main campus
- Provide services, as appropriate, based on their majors and expertise
- Integrate programs and activities of the Kernodle Center for Service-Learning and Community Engagement with the local community
Additionally, the Center could house a small library for community use, provide a database for donation items needed by the community, serve as a collection and distribution point to help students get resources to the community, and serve as a meeting spot for student groups and community partners.

This Center has great potential for deepening engaged teaching and learning at Elon. Multidisciplinary projects, community-based research, and student-created initiatives are all different when students and faculty are part of the community rather than “experts” that define the community and its needs as outsiders.

C. Creating Training for Trusteeship Grants. Based on an Ashoka-type model, this idea greatly expands the current Student Initiative Grant Program that the Kernodle Center operates. In this program, student groups identify a project that addresses a need in either the local or global community. The project can be involved in any of the four civic engagement arenas identified earlier: social services, advocacy, political campaigns, or civically-engaged business practices. Student groups would create proposals that follow specific guidelines and compete for grant money to implement their ideas. Four grants of $5,000 to $10,000 each would be awarded, two for local initiatives and two for global ones. Winners would be announced during Celebrate Week, along with presentations from the previous year’s winners to demonstrate the impact their work had on the issue they addressed.

Existing student organizations, such as fraternities and sororities, clubs, interest groups, etc., might be natural groups to compete for grants. Groups arising out of classes (service-learning classes, Periclean Scholars, Civic engagement scholars, and others) would be another source of student groups. Naming the awards and holding them up as examples of excellence would increase student participation, much like the development of the Lumen Prize has done.

A clear time line for proposals and guidelines for determining grant winners would need to be developed.

D. Increase the number of service sabbaticals (currently administered as part of Project Pericles) and student involvement in them. Building on this existing framework by encouraging student involvement with all service sabbatical projects would enhance the “seamless learning environment” at Elon, further supporting the role of co-curricular activities as important to students’ education. Resources will be needed to support both the service during the sabbaticals and to cover the work of the employee while involved in the sabbatical program.

E. Expand service-learning and community-based research. While at times it appears that we are reaching an upper limit on the number of service-learning courses and community partnerships that can be sustained, this is misleading. New faculty come to Elon with new interests, the social landscape changes, and new challenges arise for the local community. Any of these issues creates new opportunities for service-
learning. The East Burlington Center can serve as a new focal point for helping create and sustain viable and vital community partnerships to enhance our students’ learning. Creating a cadre of faculty using forms of civic engagement other than service-learning will strengthen and enhance students’ opportunities to participate in the lives of communities in meaningful and transformative ways.

Additionally, there is a growing interest both nationally and at Elon in community-based research. Examining social challenges and their causes can take students outside the library and into the lives of those whom they wish to better understand. The early stages of a faculty group to encourage community-based research have begun; additional organizational structures and supports will increase faculty and student involvement in this important activity. Expanding the supports for students engaging in community-based research will also increase involvement in this area.

III. Outcomes

These outcomes are modeled after Tufts University’s Student Civic Learning Outcomes:

Knowledge: Students will develop the knowledge required to build and sustain democratic societies

1. Students will gain knowledge of the information, concepts and theories that are essential to build democratic societies
2. Students will use this knowledge as a framework to practice critical thinking as a guide to action for building and sustaining democratic societies
3. Students will think creatively to generate innovative and effective strategies to build and sustain democratic societies

Values: Students will possess the motivations, values and ethics to effectively participate in civic engagement

4. Students will consider their own values, motivations and passions when working to effect change in society
5. Students will utilize personal value systems to create a more just world
6. Students will value the contributions of others, building and maintaining interpersonal relationships to sustain their efforts in civic engagement

Skills: Students will demonstrate the skills of active citizenship

7. Students will be able to apply knowledge to build and sustain democratic societies
8. Students will be able to inspire and/or facilitate others to build and sustain democratic societies
9. Students will be able to function effectively in a pluralistic society
10. Students will be able to assess the value and perspectives of various stakeholders when evaluating civic engagement initiatives and strategies
11. Students will be able to communicate the knowledge and values involved in building and sustaining democratic societies

IV. Measures of Success

Measuring success in this QEP will be challenging; the outcomes sought are demonstrable over the course of a student’s life, not necessarily during his or her time in college. Additionally, the “need” for this QEP lies outside of the university as well. New institutional data will be needed to evaluate success, including hanging record keeping of student community involvement to not track only hours but to determine what type of civic engagement is being done by Elon students, with the intent to have involvement in all four types of engagement and where the civic engagement occurs (local, global). With improved record keeping, some measures of success might include:

1. 90% of all Elon students will participate in at least one programmed activity designed to enhance their civic engagement by the time they graduate.
2. By May 2018, of the students involved in civic engagement activities, at least 30% of the activities will involve working with community partners located outside the Burlington/Alamance region.
3. By May 2018, at least 50% of all Elon students will have either participated in programs housed at the East Burlington Center or experienced at least 1 class taught in the facility.
4. By May 2018, 90% of first year and second year students will have a deeper understanding of both local and global issues and the interconnectedness of the two (measurement tool to be developed).
5. By May 2018, at least 300 students, working in groups, will compete annually for Training for Trusteeship grants to support local and global civic engagement activities.

V. Resources Required

Center for Civic Engagement
   Director
   Administrative Assistant
   Program budget

Lectures for 1st year students
Lectures for 2nd year students

East Burlington Center
   Director
   Administrative Assistant
   Space, utilities, etc.
VI. Literature Support


**University Websites of Interest**


