Citizenship and Civility: A Year in Review

The 2012-2013 interdisciplinary theme, Citizenship and Civility, has brought with it both tangible and intangible results. The intangible, or that feeling you cannot touch, is really about the tacit… that feeling of movement, growth, and development that occurs within a culture, or in WCU’s case, a campus culture. This theme seems to have permeated the surface of our campus culture. While this is not objectively identifiable, as it is a feeling, it is truly a set of concepts that has been touched to some degree by every student on this campus. While this theme is coming to an end, it will live on in our actions, hearts, and minds.

The tangible has played an integral role in the growth of WCU’s campus culture as an environment where our students of today can become prepared to serve as the leaders of tomorrow. This tangible environment has come from a range of activities, programs, and educative experiences that have objectively and discernibly brought to life the complex, and often unvisited, social constructs of Citizenship and Civility. When it comes to the greater purpose of the Citizenship and Civility interdisciplinary theme I am reminded of a quote by President Roger Webb (University of Central Oklahoma and Northeastern State University). He said, “The citizenship virtues of character, community, and civility are important to learn now. If a student graduates without these understandings, they will most likely never get them”.

Over the past year (September 2012-May 2013) the Citizenship and Civility committee, made up of two branches (faculty/staff and student), consisted of 17 faculty and staff members and 10 students, respectively. These committees had representation from every college and division across WCU’s campus. The committees met bi-weekly and developed a range of programs, activities, and educative experiences with the purpose and intention of bringing to life Citizenship and Civility on WCU’s campus. Here are three examples of those efforts:

- **Voter Registration, Voter Education, and Voter Engagement** was a program that focused on all components of the democratic process as it relates to Presidential Elections. Through this program the Citizenship and Civility Committee
  - **Registration** - Led to the training of an army of 100 student volunteers who were prepared to properly register fellow Catamount voters. There are quite a few rules and regulations when it comes to voter registration, and the Public Policy Institute, Center for Service Learning, and Citizenship and Civility committee developed this training program and as a result, the students who were registered through WCU were registered appropriately.
  - **Registration** - Registered nearly 1,200 new voters in Jackson County with the collaboration of the Honor’s College, Center for Service Learning, Public Policy Institute, other partisan campus groups, and NCPIRG.
  - **Registration** - Organized the “Whee Vote Day” that led to the registering of 200 new voters in the Cullowhee precinct. In addition to registration activities, candidates from both parties were on hand in front of the UC Center to meet and talk with students and community members. The candidates that were present included Marty Jones, Republican candidate for Jackson County Commissioner; Joe Sam Queen (Democrat) and Mike Clampitt (Republican), candidates for the NC House of Representatives; John Snow (Democratic), candidate for the North Carolina Senate; and Mark Meadows (Republican) and Hayden Rogers (Democrat), candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives (11th Congressional District).
  - **Education** - Hosted four debate watch parties during the month of October, which included reflection/discussion sessions addressing platform and policy issues from the candidates respectively.
  - **Education** - Organized and implemented a mock debate between student Libertarians, Democrats, and Republicans whereby each party had one student representative to present the
platform of their respective parties. Current Representative Mark Meadows was in attendance.

- **Education** – Organized and hosted a debate for the U.S. House of Representatives (11th Congressional District) between Hayden Rogers (Democrat) and Mark Meadows (Republican). This debate was attended by over 300 community members. It was streamed live on the Internet and on-demand through WLOS-TV and covered extensively by all local media outlets. The candidates also remained after the debate and talked with students about current issues. Two of our students and committee members (Kaleb Ticknor and Jeremiah Mosteller) served as guides to the candidates during their visit to campus.

- **Engagement** - During Early Voting and on Election Day our WCU/C&C Voter Shuttles shuttled nearly 1000 voters from WCU to the polls.

- **Engagement** - Why iVoted Project captured 38 testimonials of “why WCU students voted in the 2012 election”.

- **Engagement** - Hosted an Election Watch Party that had over 200 students in attendance (games, quizzes, educational activities, and MSNBC, CNN, and FOXNews all being screened).

- **Paul Loeb’s Day on Campus** was focused on engaging students, faculty, and staff with the leader and activist, Paul Loeb. Paul Loeb has spent thirty-five years researching and writing about citizen responsibility and empowerment.
  - Four classes engaged with Loeb in an intimate session – nearly 140 students total; 24 faculty members from around campus engaged with Loeb in a spirited conversation around civic engagement in the classroom; and nearly 160 folks attended the evening Loeb Lecture
  - There was a teaching wiki resource that was developed for the campus that helped professors include Loeb readings, presentations, etc. in their classes. ([http://roma.wcu.edu/groups/paulloebassignments/](http://roma.wcu.edu/groups/paulloebassignments/))
  - First-Year student Kaleb Ticknor was identified and awarded with the Community Impact Award by North Carolina Campus Compact and Paul Loeb.

- **“Civil Discussions on ________”** involved a series of discussions on campus in the spring semester to raise awareness of important issues and discuss those issues from all relevant viewpoints in a non-confrontational manner.
  - **Public Access to Government Records** – This discussion included representatives from both the media industry and government agencies to discuss both the need for access to government records and the need to keep some documents out of public view. The event was attended by approximately 15 students, faculty, and community members
  - **Raising the Age for Juvenile Offenders** – This discussion was focused on a proposed law to raise the age of being considered a juvenile from 16 to 18 in North Carolina. The discussion covered the positive and negative impact of changing this policy and was attend by approximately 50 students and WCU employees.
  - **Disabilities and Higher Education** - Here we covered current issues concerning disability policies in the university setting. Attended by approximately 15 students and staff, the audience participated in an open discuss about stereotypes associated with students with disabilities.
  - **Morality and Capitalism** – Students, faculty, and staff discussed the theoretical foundation of capitalism, its implication on the concepts of freedom, and the practicalities of a society based on capitalist doctrine. The event was attended by approximately 30 students and WCU employees.
  - **Mass Murders and the Media** - Our last discussion of the semester explored the idea of mass murderers and the constant coverage in the media with these often horrific events. Approximately 25 students and WCU employees attended this event.
• **Other Collective Efforts** that were organized under the Citizenship and Civility umbrella are as follows:
  o **9,000 students, 60,000 hours** - the approximate number of students and hours of co-curricular/curricular service with the Center for Service Learning and campus partners or through other WCU offices/programs.
  o Hunger Banquet (100 participants), Annual Gender Conference (100 participants), Whee Lead Conference (150 participants) Rotarians Against Hunger (6 participants), Stop Hunger Now (60 participants), Inter-Group Dialogue(s), No Limits March, Dance Marathon, Relay for Life, Tuck River Clean-Up, Anti-Bullying Campaign, Habitat for Humanity Women Build, TRANSaction Day, International Fest focused on Citizenship and Civility, Citizenship and Civility: Working Together for Practical Advocacy in a Polarized Era – 2nd Annual Social Work Conference, Super Storm Sandy Mini-Mester Study Trip to New York City.

*Submitted by Dr. Lane Perry, Director, Center for Service Learning at Western Carolina University.*