

CIVIC LEARNING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Most community colleges offer civic learning courses or community engagement experiences to students.

A recent survey showed that 84% of US community colleges offer some type of civic learning courses or community engagement experiences. Leaders at community colleges cited these leading reasons for offering civic learning courses or community engagement experiences: to develop students' capacity to become engaged citizens and leaders, to develop students' critical thinking skills, to develop students' skills to work collaboratively, and/or to expose students to different viewpoints.

Civic learning courses aim to help students acquire the knowledge, intellectual skills, and applied competencies that citizens need for informed and effective participation in civic life. These courses may also help students acquire an understanding of the values that underlie democratic structures and practices.

Community engagement experiences emphasize working collaboratively with groups of people who live in the same locale, have shared interests, or find themselves in similar situations and come together to address issues of concern that affect the well-being of their community.

At most community colleges, students can earn academic credit for civic learning courses or community engagement experiences.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of community colleges offer credit-bearing civic learning courses. These courses are largely designed to foster understanding of US history and American government.

However, few community colleges require these courses for all students; only one-quarter (26%) require that students take a US history course and only one-fifth (20%) require a course in American government or politics. Fewer still require courses on the US Constitution, world history, or state history.

Nine in ten community colleges (92%) offer community engagement experiences (like service learning, internships, research, and clinical fieldwork) for credit.

Most community colleges (72%) also offer non-credit-bearing community engagement experiences.

Support for developing future civic learning courses and community engagement experiences varies.

About one-third (32%) of community colleges offer professional development programs to help faculty and staff integrate civic learning and community engagement experiences into curricula.

Only 17% of community colleges have a center devoted to civic learning or community engagement. Among leaders at community colleges that do not have such a center, over half (59%) said that their institution would benefit from having one.

Community college leaders were divided over whether their colleges are offering the right amount (46%) or not enough (49%) of community engagement experiences to students.

One-third of leaders at community colleges that do not offer civic learning courses or community engagement experiences (35%) said they are likely to add courses aimed at developing students' civic learning in the next two years.