

American Democracy Project



at

Ferris State University

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Civic Engagement Pre-Audit

Ultimately, a college or university, like any organization, is most successful when it organizes activities and human efforts to focus on a specific objective or set of goals. This can be considered "institutional intentionality." The question for the pre-audit is this: What evidence is there, in the public materials and utterances of your institution, that civic engagement is a goal or desired outcome? http://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/about/project_activities.htm

The current mission statement of Ferris State University is one sentence. It was created during the administration of William Sederburg to focus attention on the university's core activity:

Ferris State University will be a national leader in providing opportunities for innovative teaching and learning in career-oriented, professional and technical education.

A variety of other documents contain the specifics of how this mission is developed in practice. These include vision statements and strategic planning documents for the university and the various divisions of the university. These are heavily focused on increasing enrollments and providing superior service to students. Attention to *civic engagement, citizenship, or community service* does not appear in these documents in any significant way.

Within the Division of Academic Affairs citizenship is referenced in the [Academic Plan](#) for the university and in the [General Education Requirements](#) for the university. Morals and ethics are mentioned in the writing, reasoning, and cultural enrichment criteria. Only in the social awareness criteria is responsible citizenship explicitly identified as an outcome.

A survey of the websites for the various colleges in the university reveals that only the College of Pharmacy explicitly mentions "an active service component" as part of their programming. This minimal visibility to service is unfortunate because a variety of programs and student organizations in the various colleges do provide and engage students in both program specific and volunteer community service projects. In a survey done for the 2000-2001 NCA *Self-Study*, faculty, staff, administrators in the Colleges of Allied Health, Arts and Sciences, Education and Human Services, Optometry, Pharmacy, and Technology reported a wide variety of community service activities. Allied Health and Optometry also operate well-established specialty clinics that provide service to the local community. For example, academic programs such as Recreation Leadership & Management, Criminal Justice, and Social Work require service learning as a component in many classes. They provide services to the local schools,

hospitals and medical facilities, and other human service agencies such as Family Independence Agency, W.I.S.E (domestic violence shelter), and the Mid Michigan Community Action Agency, to name a few. Individual students and student organizations participate in organized community service projects such as Make a Difference Day, Relay for Life, Walk for Warmth, and fundraising for United Way. Among the more than 200 student organizations, there are service organizations such as Circle K (Kiwanis), Habitat for Humanity, Red Cross, and others. FSU students are involved with Michigan Campus Compact in civic engagement programs; Student Leadership Team (increase awareness of and involvement in civic engagement), Student Community Action Network (civically engaged students meet to share information and collaborate on community service projects). Three FSU students (RMLS) have written grants and received funding for service programs (Project Challenge, Project Challenge; The Next Generation, and Operation H.O.P.E.).

Citizenship, civic engagement, community service are mentioned in the print materials sent out to new students for the [Honors Program](#). Unfortunately, this emphasis is not communicated in the program website. Citizenship, civic engagement, community service are not mentioned in any of the general print materials sent out to prospective students and their parents. However, the CD-Rom which accompanies *Unleash Your Potential* contains reference to the wide array of service activities that are available through the [Student Volunteer Center](#).

The mission of this Center is to promote a commitment to community service and to foster a life-long service ethic in students. It as a clearinghouse of information on volunteer opportunities for FSU students, faculty and staff. SVC representatives work with community agencies to develop opportunities that will not only help FSU students feel a greater sense of belonging in the community, but will also help them develop personal and career skills outside of the classroom. Approximately 80 public and private non-profit agencies provide volunteer opportunities through registration with the SVC. In past years, FSU students and RSOs reported more than 20,000 hours of community service.

The [Office of Student Leadership and Activities](#) also provides training in citizenship, but it does not use this vocabulary in the way it presents itself to students on its website.

Earlier university mission statements and related documents included more specific references to civic engagement, citizenship, and community service. The mission Woodbridge N. Ferris, the university's founder, set for the institution was "...to make the world better." This formulation figured prominently in the documents and activities celebrating the centennial of the university's founding in 1984, and for a number years after that event. Mr. Ferris went on to serve as Governor of Michigan in 1912 and 1914, and he was U.S. Senator from Michigan when he died in 1928. The example of civic engagement provided by Mr. Ferris could serve as the foundation for the development of civic engagement as an intentional outcome for Ferris graduates.