

Promoting Civic Leadership Among Agricultural College Students

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

Civic involvement has steadily decreased in the last 50 years, the “brain drain,” typically known as a term used as a synonymous of the movement of human capital, where the net flow of expertise is heavily in one direction (Giannoccolo, 2009; Salt, 1997). This concept is removing talent from rural areas, and Texas Tech graduates are seeking a sense of purpose and direction for their careers. The purpose of the Civic Leadership Academy (CLA) is to help agricultural college students from the Lubbock region realize their potential to enact change and develop their communities, beginning with themselves. The program aims to develop participants' understanding of their leadership potential and demonstrate the merits of civic leadership through engagement and interaction with entrepreneurship, nonprofits, community development, and community-driven leaders and businesses. In addition to raising awareness of opportunities to impact communities utilizing strategic methods to produce long-term results.

How it Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps

A grant was received from the Helen Jones Foundation to begin the path of allowing students the opportunity to explore civic leadership and community development in Fall 2021. College of agriculture students was invited to apply to CLA via email, class presentations, and social media. Twelve students were selected out of 48 applicants by a committee of agricultural education, communications, and leadership faculty. Participants have been introduced to the world of civic leadership and explored ways of engagement through the experiences of the program on a national, regional, and community level. Participants will propose a project at the end of the program to encapsulate the civic leadership experience and will carry out their project with a local community partner of the participants' choice. The program was developed using the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Astin, 1996; Komives & Wagner, 2016) includes:

- *Leadership Development.* The Academy students with leaders from across the ranks of Texas-based and Lubbock region-based businesses and industry (Congruence). Throughout the process, participants engage in workshops to refine their own leadership styles.
- *Values Assessment.* Academy participants are encouraged to deepen their understanding of personal (Consciousness of Self), corporate (Commitment), and community values (Congruence). Through understanding the process of value assessment and development, participants will better understand how to work through the intersection of competing values (Controversy with Conflict).
- *Community Development.* Field experiences and collaborations with community partners allow Academy participants to develop their understanding of civic leadership and engagement across multiple community levels. Nonprofits on the national, regional, and local levels will be introduced to show their role in communities.
- *Agricultural Foundations of Rural Areas/ Entrepreneurship.* Participants will gain an appreciation for the role of agriculture in the Lubbock region. They will interface with entrepreneurs, agricultural operations, small business entrepreneurs, and commodity representatives in order to understand the multi-faceted ways agriculture is incorporated into communities and how they can better leverage this into engagement and career plans.
- *Real-world Application.* After the workshops and field experiences are complete, the Academy participants decide on a capstone project in the Lubbock region to invest time,

leadership, and resources into using their training and experiences. They will demonstrate how investing in the region can be beneficial to the community while successfully demonstrating their own civic leadership skills.

Results to Date/Implications

CLA has had an outstanding 2022. Throughout the first half of the year, participants have engaged with 22 Texas Tech faculty and staff, 5 workshop presenters from outside universities, 12 nonprofit agencies represented by 18 staff, 16 local and state government representatives (including the Mayor and a State Representative), and 8 agricultural commodity and industry groups. Students report gaining a better understanding of civic leadership and strategies to make a larger impact across their communities. Many of the students have begun to serve at various nonprofits. Most report a better understanding of their own leadership capabilities and this has transferred over to student organizations on campus. Over the summer, participants will partake in the summer reading program and project interviews. CLA will conclude the 2022 cohort by engaging in workshops about international civic leadership, and adaptive leadership, a trip to Dallas to hear from national brands and Fortune 500 companies regarding civic leadership, and by developing pitches to contribute a budgeted \$10,000 towards community-based projects.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

The CLA is a program that has the capacity to change individual lives and have a real community impact. While funding was received from the Helen Jones Foundation, additional grants are currently being investigated. Continued funding will keep the CLA moving forward and impacting communities. Future plans for the CLA include expanding cohort membership, increasing community partners, collaborations, and projects, and the endowment of the program.

Community-based programming requires time, planning, and a strong network. Coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic, nonprofits are seeking new ways of engaging with college students and the community at large. There are prime opportunities for faculty members within our disciplines to create collaborations and expansions of service learning for our students across agriculture and the community. Seeking out new ways of collaborating with others across the community for service and civic projects to demonstrate to students their capacity for impacting their college communities, but also the communities they call home and will settle in for the future.

Costs/Resources Needed

The proposed budget of the CLA for Year 1 was \$30,000. While this cost may seem high, many of the startup costs will not be repeated in supplemental years. Therefore, the initial cost is an investment in the sustainability of the program and long-term implications for the community. Resources needed will vary on the community and the network of scholars and friends of your program who could supply speakers, workshops, and related resources.

References

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