

Raise Your Voice: Student Action for Change



Oklahoma Campus Compact's **Vocal Oklahomans In Civic Engagement** Initiative

PROJECT SUMMARY

Oklahoma Campus Compact – Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education
2005

Despite the largest number of volunteer hours of any other generation, college students today are uninvolved in political issues facing our nation and appear disinterested and detached from the political process. The majority of college students are absent at the polls and are viewed as apathetic and cynical.

In 2002, with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts, National Campus Compact launched the Raise Your Voice (RYV) campaign as a way to counter these negative perceptions. The tagline- *Student Action for Change*- was designed to convey the message that today's students will create change through their ideas and actions. The campaign had three goals:

- To increase college students' participation in public life on campuses across the country;
- Document the issues that are important to college students; and
- Mobilize higher education to make civic engagement central to student learning.

To achieve these goals, National Campus Compact sent out a call for proposals to state Compact offices. Oklahoma Campus Compact (OKCC) answered that call with VOICE- Vocal Oklahomans in Civic Engagement- and was awarded a two-year, \$125,460 grant to support this initiative. OkCC was later awarded a one-year extension allowing the initiative to run for three years. Goals of VOICE included:

- The creation of a student leadership team;
- Civic engagement mapping;
- Campus and statewide student dialogues;
- Creation of a student public issue statement;
- Creation of a statewide list serve;
- Participation in national Week of Action; and
- Engage at least 10 percent (with a target of 25 percent) of Oklahoma's 237,582 college and university students.

The following is a summary of what was accomplished during the three years of the VOICE initiative.

The CVC

OKCC launched the VOICE initiative at the beginning of the fall 2002 semester with the creation of the Collegiate VOICE Committee (a name created by students serving on the committee). Utilizing the Council on Student Affairs, OKCC asked each student affairs office in the state to appoint a student to serve on the CVC. Each year the committee typically had representatives from 15-20 campuses. The CVC met once a month to provide leadership to OKCC staff in how best to accomplish the goals of VOICE.

Students from the committee planned activities on their campuses to encourage student civic engagement. CVC members had the opportunity to apply for VOICE sub-grants that supported campus dialogues, Month of Action activities, voter registration/education, and many other political/civic events. The State Regent's One Net department created the CVC list serve to allow for the easy exchange of ideas and VOICE information (cvc@osrhe.edu).

Campus Mapping

During the fall 2002 semester OKCC encouraged students serving on the CVC to map out their campus. In other words, to sit down with fellow students and determine where civic engagement was strong on their campus and where it was weak. Utilizing the Campus Mapping Guide created by National Campus Compact, seven campuses mapped out their campus and sent reports back to OKCC (no funding was provided for this project). An eighth campus, East Central University, was funded to do an in-depth mapping project. A student committee at ECU spent an entire semester mapping their campus and community and submitted a report to National Campus Compact to be included in a national report.

Campus Dialogues

One of the key themes of the RYV campaign was the importance of dialogue. By addressing issues of concern through dialogue, or public deliberation, citizens can learn to solve problems by finding common ground. During the RYV campaign students were encouraged to raise their voices through campus dialogues. In the 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 academic years, OKCC funded 27 campus dialogues on 22 campuses. This

number does not include campuses that hosted dialogues as part of Month of Action. Dialogue topics ranged from campus issues, such as what the school mascot should be, to national issues, such as foreign policy.

In an effort to include students from across the state in dialogue together, OkCC hosted a statewide dialogue in spring 2003 and 2004. The first year OkCC utilized resources from the Oklahoma Partnership for Public Deliberation and used the National Issues Forum book “Governing America: Our Choices, Our Challenge.” Students who had graduated from an NIF Public Policy Institute moderated and recorded the dialogue. Twenty-four students from eight different campuses participated in this dialogue.

In 2004 the CVC recommended doing something different than the standard dialogue or forum. Partnering with the Jewish Federation of Greater Oklahoma City, OkCC invited Michael Korenblit, author of *Until We Meet Again* and director of the Respect Diversity Foundation, to speak at an event titled “Raise Your Voice: Lessons from the Holocaust.” Korenblit told the story of his parents surviving the Holocaust and connected lessons from that era to the importance of being engaged today.



Students participate in the spring 2003 VOICE statewide dialogue, "Governing America: Our Choices, Our Challenge."

Public Issue Statement (see appendix A)

One of the early goals of OKCC was to encourage students involved in VOICE to write an “issue statement” addressing why college students tend to avoid traditional forms of

political engagement. In December 2002 students serving on the CVC held a dialogue on “service versus politics.” From the notes taken at this dialogue, OSU student Summer (Stowe) Johnson wrote a document titled “The Oklahoma Students’ Civic Engagement Resolution.” This issue statement listed the students’ grievances and declared their responsibilities as citizens. The students called on higher education to produce citizens and not just professionals.

The issue statement was presented to the Council of Presidents, the Council on Student Affairs, and the State Regents. In the spring 2003 edition of the Peer Review, Dr. Edward Zlotkowski and Dr. Dilafruz Williams mentioned that the statement “indicates the broad degree to which higher education is perceived as having failed to formulate and implement ‘an updated version of itself as a participant in the life of civic society, as a citizen of American Democracy’” (Sullivan 2000, 21).

Voter Registration

In response to the declining trend in voter turnout among 18-24 year-olds, OkCC sponsored the first VOICE statewide voter registration contest October 1-2, 2003. Twenty-one campuses participated in this first contest and registered 2,539 student voters. The winning campus was Langston University, whose student organizers registered 445 students (11.9% of their student body).



OK Christian President O'Neil accepts the 2005 Voter Champion banner as SGA President Jacob Davis looks on

In 2004 as the nation focused on a heated presidential election, VOICE joined hundreds of other organizations encouraging college students to vote. The VOICE Get-Out-The-Vote initiative provided small sub-grants for students to not only register voters, but educate them on the issues and mobilize them to the polls. During the 2nd annual VOICE

voter registration contest, 23 campuses participated in the two day contest registering 3,910 voters. Oklahoma Christian won the contest by registering nearly 12 percent of their student body. The day before Election Day (November 1) VOICE sponsored Mobilization Day. OkCC provided small grants to eight campuses to support last minute mobilization efforts and provided one-page descriptions of all nine OK state questions, “I Promise” voter stickers, and voter pledge cards to all participating campuses.



National Month of Action (formerly Week of Action)

For the past three years (2003-2005) OkCC has sponsored VOICE Month of Action in conjunction with the National Month of Action (the first year was Week of Action). MOA was started as a way for students to collectively demonstrate the power of student engagement and voice.

OkCC awarded nine sub-grants the first year, eleven the second year, and seven the third year. Students used this money to support campus dialogues, political engagement fairs, voter registration drives, drug and alcohol awareness day, food drives, breakfast with legislators, poster events, conversations with the mayor, blood drives, and much more.



2003- Governor Henry speaks to students

To kick off Week of Action (February 17-23, 2003) OkCC hosted a luncheon at the state capitol. Over 80 students and administrators attended this event, including National RYV Coordinator Nick Longo from National Campus Compact. Students presented “The Oklahoma Students’ Civic Engagement Resolution” and Governor Brad Henry proclaimed it “Week of Action” in Oklahoma.



Nick Longo from National CC

In 2004 OkCC began Month of Action with a student reception at the capitol and a forum in the House Chambers. Dr. Stephen Haseley, an Oklahoma State University professor and trained NIF moderator, facilitated a forum entitled, “Making a Difference- Civic Engagement: How do we make it happen?”

Finally, in 2005 OkCC hosted a third capitol kick-off. As sometimes happens, events beyond OkCC's control prevented this kick-off from happening as planned. The two state legislators scheduled to speak were held up in a vote on the floor and a student event held earlier in the week at the capitol created lower attendance for the VOICE event. However, in spite of these challenges a group of 20 students were able to hear from OK Secretary of State Susan Savage and take a meaningful tour of the state capitol building.

Faculty-Student Service Learning Institute

January 20-21, 2005 OkCC hosted the first ever Faculty-Student Service Learning Institute. Twenty-five faculty-student teams attended the two-day Institute. Teams learned about student involvement in the academic planning process and how service learning is linked to civic engagement. Together, faculty members worked with student colleagues to redesign an existing course to include a service learning component. National Facilitators included: Dr. Edward Zlotkowski (Bentley College), Dr. Rick Battistoni (Providence College), Ms. Regina Hughes (Collin County Community College), Ms. Sherita Moses (National Campus Compact), Ms. Angela Kelly (Providence College Graduate), Mr. Will Chatwin (University of Utah Student), and Ms. Shannon Hodges (Rose State College Student).



Tins Pena (faculty) and Nancy Shelton (student) from Tulsa Community College stand next to their course revision poster

Feedback from the Institute was positive. One student participant noted that OkCC needs to continue doing events like this as a way to sustain the work of VOICE. Participating teams were asked to return to their campus and present what they learned to the faculty senate and student government association, with the goal of implementing the newly reconstructed course in the fall 2005 semester. Teams were asked to report back to OkCC by the end of May 2005 on their efforts during the spring semester.

Statistics

For each VOICE sponsored or funded activity, students and campus administrators were asked to fill out an activity tracking form. This simple form allowed them to give a brief summary of the event and document how many people were involved or reached. The

following statistics are not scientific, but are calculations taken from the activity tracking forms submitted to OkCC over the course of the three year initiative.

2002-2003

- 9,748 Students and administrators engaged in some form of civic activity.
- 13 Campuses participated in a total of 18 campus dialogues.
- 24 Students from 8 different campuses participated in a National Issues Forum entitled “Governing America: Our Choices, Our Challenge.”
- 8 Campuses participated in a Campus Mapping Project, with one completing a nationally sponsored in-depth mapping project.
- 80+ Students, administrators, and state legislators participated in a VOICE Capitol Luncheon.

2003-2004

- 22,278 students, administrators, and community member participated in some form of civic activity.
- 9 campuses participated in campus dialogues.
- 8 students received scholarships to attend the Public Policy Institute.
- 75 students and administrators attended the Month of Action Kick-off at the capitol.
- 2,538 students registered to vote in the VOICE Voter Registration Contest.
- 57 students and community members participated in Raise Your VOICE: Lessons from the Holocaust.

2004-2005

- 3,910 students registered to vote in the VOICE Voter Registration Contest
- 4923 students, administrators, and faculty participated in Get-Out-The-Vote and Voter Mobilization activities.
- 993 students, administrators, faculty, and community members participated in Month of Action.
- 20 students participated in the Month of Action kick-off at the state capitol.

Conclusion

Though the national initiative has come to an end, it is OkCC’s goal to continue including students into all areas of OkCC’s work and to continue sponsoring various VOICE

events/activities each year. From the beginning of this campaign OkCC acknowledged that a three-year campaign was not going to solve the decline in student civic engagement. However, it is our hope that VOICE has allowed students on campuses across Oklahoma a chance to begin conversations on the importance of political and community engagement; a chance to glimpse what can happen when students raise their voices.

OkCC ends this initiative knowing that there still remains much work to be done. A quote from a student VOICE coordinator on an Oklahoma campus summarizes the task ahead: “I have learned that the only way to reach every student is to bring civic engagement into the classrooms. However, because my university values job skills over civic education, this has been a difficult task. I am now working with individual professors to bring civic engagement opportunities to students. Little by little, I know students’ attitudes on my campus have been changed, but establishing a habit of civic engagement has not yet been accomplished. The institution of higher education will have to make public life a priority before this will be achieved.” *(See appendix B, C, and D for more student reflection)*



OKLAHOMA STUDENTS' CIVIC ENGAGEMENT RESOLUTION

We, as Oklahoma college students, and citizens of this state and nation, are taking on our civic responsibility, to inform, advocate, and empower our peers. We feel it is necessary for all citizens to become civically engaged.

Our generation, of whom more participate in community service than any other cohort, remains disinterested and detached from traditional political activism. As future leaders of Oklahoma, it is imperative that we determine how to connect our civic responsibilities with the political process.

Our Grievances

Our major grievances address issues of the political agenda and process, public education's priorities and our own civic ignorance, and society's perception of our generation.

Our generation's definition of "politics" includes words such as *greed, intimidation, complex, power, money, and authority*. Our peers' apathy of the political process has led to a decline in voter turnout and has disengaged our generation.

Political leaders are not effectively addressing issues that affect young people. Too often, our candidates' platforms address healthcare, welfare, and social security, instead of issues such as higher education funding. Political activities are indifferent to the issues that address the immediate needs of the younger generations. We feel powerless and separated from the political process.

We value education and the knowledge required to become informed citizens. However, the higher education institutions do not provide adequate education and knowledge about our civic responsibilities. We often do not know how to address civic issues. Higher education institutions' primary focus is to produce professionals, when instead they should be producing citizens.

Because the voting and political process has discouraged our generation, we, as young people, are participating in social and service work that addresses our issues. Yet, we are

not taken seriously. Society views our generation as rebellious and selfish, even though we are volunteering at an all time high.

Our Responsibilities

We declare that it is our responsibility to become an engaged generation with the support of our political leaders, education institutions, and society.

Our political leaders should foster a culture of civic responsibility by supporting resolutions and bills that utilize young people's voices and commitment to education.

The mission of our state higher education institutions should be to educate future citizens about their civic as well as professional duties. We urge our institutions to prioritize and implement civic education in the classroom, in research, and in services to the community.

We ask members of society to set an example for us as active, engaged citizens in communities. We learn from those who we respect and trust. Responsibility for our political apathy belongs both to us as individuals and members of society.

And, we, as young citizens, must take advantage of civic education to learn and practice our responsibilities and privileges. We must determine how to effectively link our commitment to service with politics.

Our Conclusion

We expect that our leaders of this state, educational institutions and society as a whole will fulfill their responsibilities to assist our efforts in mobilizing our generation. In turn, political activity will create responsiveness to issues significant to young people, which will restore relevance to civic engagement.

Addressing our generation's political apathy will create positive social change on our campuses, in our communities, and in the future of Oklahoma.

Student Supporters

BJ Barrick- Rose State College
Ellinda McKinny-Jones- Seminole State College
Lindsay Baugh- Cameron University
Sherita Moses- Langston University
Scott Bevan- Connors State College
Joseph Bojang- OSU-Okmulgee
Staci Owens- Oklahoma City Community College
Ashley Freeman- OSU-Oklahoma City
Micah Robinson- St. Gregory's University
Nicole Idleman- Murray State College
Carol Saville- East Central University

Terry Lawson- Murray State College
Jamie Beth Seay- Southeastern Oklahoma State University
Brandi Martin- Southwestern Oklahoma State University
Brandi Showalter- Northeastern State University
Marilyn McDow- University of Central OK
Summer Stowe Johnson- Oklahoma State University
Brad Wilson- Northwestern Oklahoma State University
Jaylynn Pound- Rose State College
Chista Evans- Northwestern Oklahoma State University
Kristel Wilson- Oklahoma State University
Leslie Doolittle- Southeastern Oklahoma State University

Lessons Learned
By Lindsay Baugh- Cameron University

The most important lesson I have learned through working with the Raise Your Voice campaign is not to give up. Many times I have become discouraged when working with students because they are so apathetic. Sometimes it was hard to make people understand the importance of the project. Most college students have their priorities set and do not want to get involved with anything extra. It was tough to find help from students and sometimes administration. I also became discouraged when I would invite fifteen people to meetings and only four would show up. At times I was frustrated when we had activities, such as a voter registration drive, and students would not register because they blatantly said they didn't care about taking part in our democracy.

Although I became frustrated and felt I wasn't making a difference, I learned that in the bigger picture I had made an impact. Now many people on my campus know what the Raise Your Voice campaign is. Administration is well aware and eager to continue the project on our campus. Our campus media has reported many times about the campaign and students are talking about it.

No matter how much I felt I wasn't reaching people, I had to keep working and talking with people. It takes time for people to understand a concept such as civic engagement. I feel that over this two-year campaign many young people have become exposed to civic engagement and are applying it to their lives. It is so important to never give up when working on a project like this. However frustrating it may be in the beginning, in the long run, that one person you may have reached will grow into many more.

Lessons Learned
By Summer Johnson- Oklahoma State University

Working with the Raise Your Voice campaign has changed my life and has been an incredible educational experience for me. As the coordinator for the campaign on my campus and co-chairwoman for Oklahoma, I have learned important lessons, including how to involve students in public life and the power of deliberation. But, above all, I've learned that I should expect more from my higher education. Higher education institutions need to prepare young people to become active citizens, not just successful professionals.

I have learned that students' apathy is due to our generation's ignorance rather than individual attitudes. I did not realize just how uniformed my peers were about public life outside their "world" until I took on the task of trying to engage them. I think most of this apathy extends from their preconceived perception of the word "politics." I have spent many hours explaining to students that most of their activities are political in essence—discussing problems with administrators, participating in their college's student council, etc. I have learned that breaking down this misconception of politics has had the greatest effect on the attitudes of students across my campus. Before, politics seemed "untouchable," but now, students are realizing they can make positive change, both individually and as a whole. I have been asked if college students share one voice. To this question, I have coined a new term—"unified individualization." However ironic this phrase may seem, I have learned that it is necessary to create opportunities for all individuals and organizations to coordinate their efforts to motivate the rest of the campus. I think that each student's voice is unique but by collaborating our voices, we will have a definite impact on all aspects of public life in the next decade.

I have learned how powerful the process of public deliberation can be in engaging students. Although getting students to participate in dialogues has been a difficult task, students who have attended dialogues now value the process and are willing to participate in future dialogues. Some RYV committee members have even started to facilitate dialogues in their own classes.

I have learned that the only way to reach every student is to bring civic engagement into the classrooms. However, because my university values job skills over civic education, this has been a difficult task. I am now working with individual professors to bring civic engagement opportunities to students.

Little by little, I know that students' attitudes on my campus have been changed, but establishing a habit of civic engagement has not yet been accomplished. The institution of higher education will have to make public life a priority before this will be achieved.

Lessons Learned
By Sherita Moses- Langston University

Being a member of the Collegiate VOICE Committee (CVC) has afforded me the opportunity to learn new ways of getting to my peers in order to address concerns that we all have in regards to our community and future. Dialoguing in order to affect change in our community has been an avenue that has led to some of the most well learned lessons throughout my tenure as the CVC Chair at Langston University. Through dialoguing with my peers I have discovered the changes that they desire, as well as ways in which to encourage civic involvement. There are two key lessons that we have learned; our peers not only have apathetic feelings towards politics and have the view that their vote doesn't count, but rather they feel as though politicians are all the same, and seem to seek instant gratification from participating in any form of civic engagement.

While many young voters understand the importance of voting, they do not desire to become civically engaged because they feel as though many politicians are not trust worthy and are out for self gain, as opposed to looking out for the better good of the people that they represent. Often we hear students say that even when they listen to what politicians have to say they are all saying the same thing, and often do not uphold the promises that they have made. Therefore, it is obvious that as concerned individuals for our civic future we must find ways in which to make our peers believe in civic responsibility, and the importance of continuing to trust in the civic process to discover a representative that is willing to vie for the values and issues that are important to the everyday man.

Our generation is one that has become accustomed to instant gratification on all levels of life, that expectation is not different from civic involvement. Many of our peers volunteer because they receive an instant sense of satisfaction while volunteering, with the immediate knowledge that they are making things better. This is not the case with voting, volunteering on campaigns, or just being aware of the politics in our communities. They often feel as though they don't know what to look for in a candidate, or whether the issue at hand directly affects them, or simply not knowing where to find the information. Therefore, we have found that providing information as to how to find the information has been helpful, reminders of the election days, or making them aware when there is civic news that they should pay attention to, this list does goes on. Since, we want our peers to get civically involved we must finds ways in which to impact them enough for them to want to continue to seek civic knowledge which may lead to their involvement.

With these lessons we have found that we must reach our peers in unusual places in order to inform them of the civic nuances that are occurring around them. By doing this we are exposing our peer to information that might spark some desire to seek more information or perhaps this exposure will help them to realize civic importance.

Lessons Learned
By Ellinda McKinney-Jones

What I have learned is nothing simple nor effortless. Who would have ever thought that a mother and a non traditional student of 30 years old would have ever been impacted by the Vocal Oklahomans in Civic Engagement? I know I sure didn't think that I would have; however, I have in more ways than I could ever count.

It was not an easy task that I started about three years ago. Not knowing myself what exactly civic engagement is and how to share it with others, everyone I talked with at school had no clue either. As I grew to learn and share ideas with others, others learned, shared, and grew with me; whether I was doing a dialogue or registering people to vote on our campus. I have not only learned the importance of civic engagement, but have been able to try and share this with almost 2,000 students at my home school.

What was really awesome is that I had an advantage over some of the other VOICE members. Not only was I a VOICE member, I was also the Student Government President on my campus. That meant that I could make VOICE a priority on my campus of Seminole State College. So not only did Student Government make it a main concern to be civically involved, I also got to make sure that the other ten organizations on the SCC campus made it a top priority. Although some organizations are already civically involved, it became a healthy competition to be just as good. That is what made it awesome for our campus.

While all of this is going on in our small school, I am learning. I am learning not only to be a civic citizen of this country but and example to my children. I am setting an example of how important it is to be civically involved. It doesn't matter if I am just volunteering to a local charity, attending a town meeting, or taking my vote to the polls; it is vital that my children understand that being able to do these things is a tremendous opportunity that many people don't get to express. I cannot convey it strongly enough not to take it for granted.

Even if I never had the opportunity to share everything with my campus of Seminole State College, I did get the opportunity to share it with my family. Furthermore, I am starting my next generation and teaching them the importance of being civically involved. If that is the furthest I got to share my experience with, I would be thankful to the man above. However, I had the opportunity to share this wonderful experience with students on a campus of almost two thousand students. Therefore, I could never be thankful enough to have been able to share my experience as a member of the VOICE committee.