

Civic Engagement Program Description

The 100th anniversary of New Hampshire's First-in-the-Nation Primary provides a unique opportunity to educate our community college students about the political process, public policy issues and the importance of well informed citizenship and encourage them to become involved in the political process and issues that affect them.

In September, 2015, NH's community colleges will be offering New Hampshire Presidential Primary civics classes at the seven colleges. The course offered at each of the colleges will be a hybrid of online and in the classroom. Students will have an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the forces that affect democracy, their community and the nation's future with the goal of engagement.

Along with the classes a series of presidential candidate forums are being planned at the 7 community colleges campuses in NH. Individual candidate will be invited to participate in a discussion with students taking the civic course, along with members of community college advisory boards and invited community members. The forums will be structured to provide an opportunity for civil and well-informed political discourse. In addition to the candidate forums, there will be forums with prominent policy experts providing students an opportunity to extend their learning and engagement.

The classes at the colleges will include an introduction to the history and role of the NH presidential primary and an introduction to important healthcare, economic, and higher education policy issues and socio-economic issues affecting the widening opportunity gap nationally. Social media "reporting" by the students will be an integral part of the course work, offering students outlets to provide the "youth perspective" on presidential campaign issues.

Partnership organizations will contribute content to the course. Partners include: NH Charitable Foundation, the Concord Coalition/Fix the Debt, Dartmouth-Hitchcock, Live Free or Die Alliance, NH Coalition for Job Creation, NH Institute of Civics Education and Northeast Delta Dental.

In the course and in the forums, community college students will gain a deeper understanding of the forces that affect their community and the nation's future. They will experience the democratic process, learning the skills and knowledge necessary for effective citizenship. The curriculum, format and social media reporting will be shared with NH high school students and community college students across the nation.

Outcomes of this initiative will be measurable in various ways. Questions will be added to the annual CCSNH student survey to gauge changes in civic engagement. There will be tracking the attendance at each forum, the clicks on the social media reporting and the level and diversity of participation at each forum. The student traffic results and activity on the LFDA website would become another important indicator of their participation in civic engagement and discussion.

This initiative will enrich NH community college student's appreciation of the democratic process and their knowledge of public policy and how it impacts their lives, while also making an impression on candidates, regarding the needs and priorities of the community college students and their family. It can be a model for student engagement for other community colleges and states nationally.