

AY20 Academic Program Improvement Report: Civic Engagement

INTEGRATIVE STUDIES

W20 IS 401

N = 14

AY19 Recommendation for Improvement: The results of this assessment, which are very positive overall for student commitment to Civic Engagement, do call for additional intervention for those few students who do not grasp the importance of the program's Civic Engagement outcome. The results of this assessment should be shared with the Integrative Advisory Council and the plans for "gentle feedback" reviewed and articulated, with the results assessed in an AY20 IS 401 class. The AY20 CE Improvement Plan should report on the results of these efforts and provide data on a course where the improvements have been operationalized.

Improvements (briefly describe improvements made based on the recommendation above):

While the original course design and content of IS 401 already appears to afford considerable opportunity to demonstrate 'civic engagement' for most students through the structured guidance inherent in the Interdisciplinary Research Capstone project, a few students continue to initially fail to frame their research question outwardly toward addressing a 'real-world' problem or controversy in such a way as to constitute substantive civic engagement. To help this minority of students shift their focus early toward civic engagement as an interdisciplinary problem-solving endeavor, I have been providing 'gentle feedback' within their initial "Proposal & Focus" written component as outlined in the AY20 Action Plan. An example of such feedback is as follows: The student initially framed their research question as "what factors influence the willingness of people to evacuate in emergency situations?" My suggestion was for her to consider ways she might reframe her research question more as a problem that needs to be solved—perhaps, something like, "How do we convince those in evacuation zones that evacuation is preferable to sheltering in place without coercion?" In another example, the student's initial research question was, "can communications and writing work together to help improve relationship satisfaction and lead to stronger relationships?" I suggested she reframe her research question as more open-ended (i.e. not 'yes/no'). Perhaps, something like, "How do we encourage a wider array of communication strategies to improve relationship satisfaction and minimize negative relationship outcomes?" I have found that once a research question is settled on that sets the student on a trajectory of substantive civic engagement, subsequent written components follow that trajectory nicely toward demonstrating civic engagement successfully.

Program Civic Engagement Verticality (briefly describe how Civic Engagement is reinforced in the program curriculum & co-curriculum, e.g. club activities):

Component assignments and structured guidance throughout IS 401 encourage and remind students to focus on complex problems that impact their local or broader community. ‘Complex problem’ itself is defined as a real-world problem that has not and arguably cannot be solved from a single disciplinary approach, thus necessitating an interdisciplinary approach. There are many examples for students to explore that are relevant to a variety of disciplines and areas of interest. Ensuring that students adopt a research question toward this end at the outset of their Capstone project is instrumental in setting students on a ‘civic-engagement’ trajectory. Additionally, the e-portfolio begun in IS 301 and revised in IS 401 is designed to afford ‘civic engagement’ orientation with prospective audiences in mind.

Faculty Review (Have the results of these improvements been reviewed by program faculty?):

Yes.