

# Academic Credit for Student Electoral Engagement



Student Election Engagement Fellows can greatly enhance your campus nonpartisan election engagement efforts. Trained, supported, and guided by their Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) state director, these Fellows collaborate with campus election engagement coalitions, recruit teams of volunteer peers, and help with voter registration, voter education, and Get Out The Vote initiatives.

## Supporting Electoral Engagement Through Academic Credit

CEEP funds some of these Fellows through stipends, but can only do so during peak election periods and at a limited number of schools. An excellent alternative is offering academic credit for their participation as part of a classroom service-learning project or independent study contract. Faculty can offer this to particularly interested students, or recruit a team to work together collaboratively. If students have more modest amounts of time available, they can still get credit for their participation, but without taking a leadership role.

This approach can work in any course that includes a service-learning element. Faculty assign a specified number of required hours, plus a reflection component, like writing a report or making a class presentation. They then connect students with your campus nonpartisan engagement coalition, and CEEP state director. They can also give credit for volunteering in off-campus nonpartisan or partisan election efforts of the students' choice, so long as there's a structure for them to learn from their experience.

## The James Madison University Model

CEEP partner James Madison University (JMU) developed this approach in 2013 while CEEP was engaging campuses in Virginia's statewide elections. As part of her senior social work seminar, JMU professor Laura Trull required an extensive semester-long service-learning project. Students would select a particular problem and volunteer with a community agency that worked to address it, applying lessons from their courses while working towards a solution. They'd also write a paper describing the problem they took on, the role of their partner agency, and their impact in tackling the problem.

Professor Trull offered students a choice of different projects to fulfill this requirement, including helping run JMU's nonpartisan election engagement efforts. [Four students signed up to work as a team](#) to engage the campus, collaborating with others in JMU's engagement coalition. Building on existing relationships and networks, they emphasized peer-to-peer conversations while registering voters, collecting pledges to vote, and distributing resources like CEEP's [nonpartisan candidate guides](#). They also held rallies, organized flash mobs, and arranged shuttles and other rides to the polls. Two of the students were so inspired they decided to make a career of community organizing, and one ran CEEP's Virginia efforts the next year.

JMU'S DUKES VOTE BUTTON.



JMU'S SOCIAL WORK STUDENT FELLOW ISAAC TRICE.

### Bringing the JMU Model to Your Campus



Led by the former JMU social work student, we expanded the model in 2014 to a half dozen schools, engaging both social work and political science departments. And we've expanded it further since then. Even if students may not have as much available time as those in the JMU social work class, the core process of offering academic credit for spearheading nonpartisan engagement is easy:

- 1 Identify and approach** departments or faculty that might want to support campus electoral engagement efforts. Besides social work, many disciplines have courses that require semester or quarter-long projects with real-world components. A sociology, political science, anthropology, communications, rhetoric, or psychology course—even an English or composition course—could easily use election engagement experience as a centerpiece for learning and reflection. Discipline-related organizations like a political science club can be fertile networks for interested faculty or students. If existing courses can't adapt their service-learning requirements, faculty can grant independent study credit for a similar process.
- 2 If you're an interested faculty member**, create a credit structure that combines engagement and reflection. It may vary depending on your particular course, but will include a minimum amount of time students are required to volunteer, criteria on what their efforts will include, and a process through which they can learn from their experience. If your course structure won't allow enough credit to support students becoming full-time Fellows (CEEP-funded Fellows work 10 hours a week), you can still give credit for more modest participation levels.
- 3 Once students sign up to volunteer, find a campus point person** to help supervise them. You could take on this role as a faculty member, or designate a given participant in your campus coalition. This point person will collaborate with your CEEP state director to train and coach the Fellows, taking whatever role in the process they prefer. Together with our state director, they'll ensure that the approaches of the Fellows are strictly nonpartisan and that they understand state registration and voting laws, while
- advising them on organizing materials and events, distributing materials, and recruiting volunteers.
- 4 Register and educate** students on your campus. The JMU Fellows held weekly meetings with student government leaders and key organizations like the college Democrats, Republicans and Libertarians. They coordinated campus events, worked with the student newspaper, conducted outreach in classes and at campus events like pre-football game tailgate parties, engaged their peers through conversations and social media, and were featured on the local news station.
- 5 Get Out The Vote** by finding exciting ways to remind others of the election. On Election Day, the JMU interns started their outreach at 5:00 AM and did not stop until the polls closed. An a capella group that one of the Fellows belonged to sang at key campus locations to remind students to turn out.
- 6 Measure your impact** by tracking voter registration forms completed, number of attendees at events, social media reach, etc. This will help your campus learn from what worked and what didn't. And then you can enlist a new group of students in the next cycle.

**For more information on ways student Fellows can further your nonpartisan engagement efforts**, check out our [Seven Key Ways To Engage Your Campus](#).

**For further information**, [contact your CEEP state Director](#), CEEP National Director [Amy Ludwig](#) or James Madison University's [Laura Hunt Trull](#). For more information on the nonpartisan Campus Election Engagement Project, visit [www.campuselect.org](http://www.campuselect.org).