

Civic Engagement in Virginia Higher Education

Jodi Fisler, Ph.D.

Senior Associate for Assessment Policy & Analysis

October 24, 2023



STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER
EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA

Presentation Outline

- **Foundation of SCHEV's civic engagement work**
- **Policy in practice**
- **Ongoing work**
- **Discussion**

Foundation of SCHEV's civic engagement work

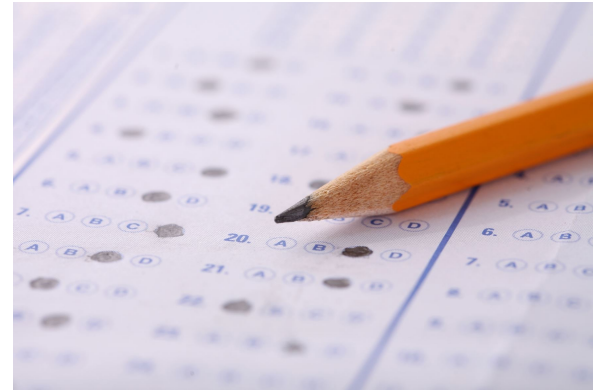
Code of Virginia § 23.1-203

“[The Council shall...] in cooperation with public institutions of higher education, develop guidelines for the assessment of student achievement. Each such institution shall use an approved program that complies with the guidelines of the Council and is consistent with the institution’s mission and educational objectives in the development of such assessment. The Council shall report each institution’s assessment of student achievement in the revisions to the Commonwealth’s statewide strategic plan for higher education.”

What do we mean by assessment?

Assessment is deciding what we want our students to learn and making sure they learn it.

~ Linda Suskie



Suskie, L. (2018). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Policy overview

A college education in Virginia—regardless of major or specialized field of study—ideally should emphasize:

- Broad learning
- Intellectual and practical skills
- Integrative and adaptive learning
- Personal and social responsibility

Assess student achievement in at least 6 areas (primarily using direct methods):

- Critical thinking
- Written communication
- Quantitative reasoning
- Civic engagement
- Institution-specific competencies (2 or more)

What is civic engagement?

“Civic engagement [is] an array of knowledge, abilities, values, attitudes, and behaviors that in combination allow individuals to contribute to the civic life of their communities.”

Source: *Policy on Student Learning Assessment and Quality in Undergraduate Education*, p. 4 (SCHEV, 2017)

Framework for 21st Century Civic Learning & Democratic Engagement

Knowledge	Skills	Values	Collective Action
Key democratic texts & principles	Critical inquiry, analysis & reasoning	Respect for freedom & human dignity	Integration of knowledge, skills & values to inform actions taken with other people
Political systems & levers for influencing change	Seeking & being informed by multiple perspectives	Empathy	Navigation of political systems & processes
Cultures, histories & religious traditions that have shaped US society	Deliberation & bridge-building across differences	Open-mindedness	Public problem-solving with diverse partners
Sources of identity & their influence on civic values & responsibilities	Collaborative decision-making	Ethical integrity	Compromise, civility & mutual respect

Excerpted from: *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*, p. 4 (AAC&U, 2012)

Why civic engagement?

The Virginia Plan (2014)

Goal #2: Optimize Student Success for Work & Life

“Strengthen curricular options to ensure that graduates are prepared with the competencies necessary for employment and **civic engagement.**”

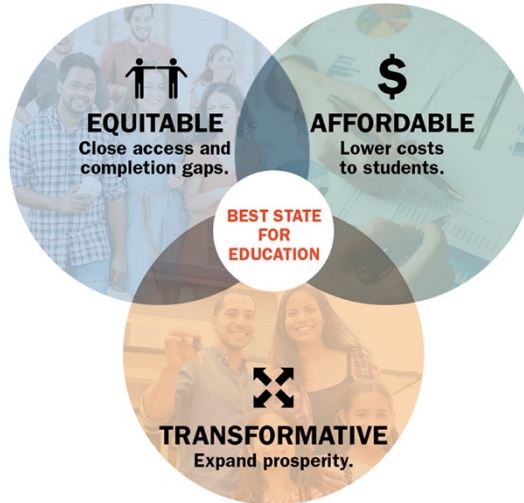
Priority initiative #4:

“Collaborate with institutions to measure the quality of undergraduate education, including **civic engagement** of graduates and relevance to demand occupations across regions of the state.”

The Virginia Plan (2020)

PATHWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY: THE VIRGINIA PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Remove barriers to access and attainment, especially for Black, Hispanic, Native American and rural students; students learning English as a second language; students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; and students with disabilities.



Invest in and support the development of initiatives that provide cost savings to students while maintaining the effectiveness of instruction.

Increase the social, cultural and economic well-being of individuals and communities within the Commonwealth and its regions.

NACE Competencies

Career readiness competencies for new college graduates, identified by the National Association of Colleges & Employers:

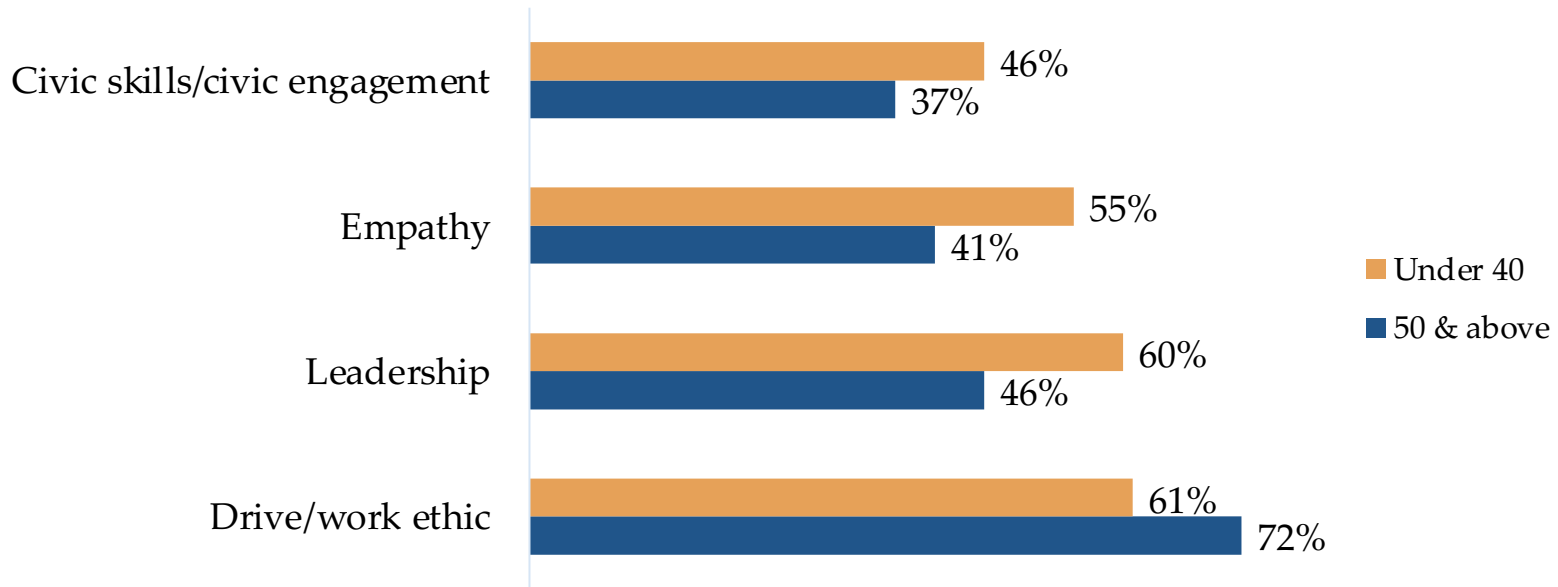
- **Career & Self-development**
- **Communication**
- **Critical thinking**
- **Equity & Inclusion**
- **Leadership**
- **Professionalism**
- **Teamwork**
- **Technology**

Many employers are much more “likely to consider hiring a graduate” with community-based experience.

	Much more likely		
	All employers	Employers 50 & up	Employers under 40
Internship or apprenticeship	49%	43%	51%
Working in community settings with people from diverse backgrounds or cultures	47%	34%	53%
Community-based or service-learning project	41%	20%	54%

Source: Finley, A. (2021). *How college contributes to workforce success: Employer views on what matters most*. AAC&U.

Younger employers consider different skills and mindsets to be “very important” for college graduates.



Source: Finley, A. (2021). *How college contributes to workforce success: Employer views on what matters most*. AAC&U.

Policy in practice

How are learning & engagement achieved?

Course-based learning

- Knowledge
- Skills

Extra-curricular activities

- Behaviors



How are learning & engagement assessed?

Multiple assessment methods

- Course-embedded assignments
- ePortfolios
- Surveys
- National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE)



Traveling Town Hall
Candidates are coming October 10! Join us for **FREE PIZZA & make informed Election choices!**

Candidate Stops

- 6-7 pm Grace Street Apartments [Enter through main entrance in the courtyard, accessible from the front of the building]
- 7-8 pm Eagle Hall [Enter through main entrance on construction side of building]
- 8-9 pm Shenandoah Hall [Enter on the E-Hall side of the building, walk down through courtyard to the Multipurpose Room]

Senate Candidates

Congressional Candidates

Jennifer Lewis Ben Cline

Students are more knowledgeable as a result of participating in JMU's Traveling Town Hall.

As a result of participating in this town hall, I am more:

knowledgeable about state government and issues in Virginia.	100%
knowledgeable about the candidates who participated in the town hall.	100%
informed about political issues.	100%
knowledgeable about elections.	83%

All respondents reported that participation in the event increased in their knowledge about state government/issues in Virginia, political issues in general, and the candidates who participated in the event.

83% reported increased knowledge in elections.

Ongoing work

Days of Dialogue

Day-long events focused on civic learning and engagement

- **Panels & presentations**
- **Facilitated breakout discussions**
- **Informal networking**



Photo credit: JMU University Marketing & Branding

General Findings (2022)

- **Energy around debate → discussion → dialogue**
- **Need to break down silos within & among institutions**
- **Need to build trust**
- **Need to build and sustain capacity**
- **Desire for regular opportunities to talk & collaborate**

Actions Taken

- **Convened working group to identify priorities**
- **Established partnership with the Constructive Dialogue Institute**
 - 12 institutions participating in 2023-24
- **Drafted new guidance statement**

Constructive Dialogue Initiative

- **Faculty/Staff training**
 - Reynolds Community College, August 18
 - UVA, October 19
 - Virginia Tech, November 10
- **Analysis of implementation data**
- **Possible extension and expansion**

Other Actions

- **Additional “days of dialogue”**
- **Spotlight videos**

www.schev.edu/institutions/teaching-assessment-initiatives/student-learning-assessment

- **Resource map of activities and assessment practices**
- **Participation in the Multi-State Collaborative for College Civic Learning & Democracy Engagement (MSC-CLDE)**

The Ultimate Goal

Identify, support and leverage work being done by others at national, state and institution levels.

Fill in the gaps where we can.

Prepare Virginia's students to be effective participants in a pluralistic democratic society.

Questions/Discussion