

Hofstra University Center for Civic Engagement

Believing that informed and involved students are more likely to participate in the democratic process, Hofstra University has established the **Center for Civic Engagement** to encourage students to become knowledgeable and active citizens in their on-campus, local, national and global communities.

“Democracies need engaged citizens,” says Cynthia Bogard, Ph.D., associate professor of sociology and the center’s director. “And the habit of active participation in one’s civic life typically starts in one’s youth. The Hofstra community wants to make sure that our students are given every opportunity to practice civic involvement while they are learning with us. We see it as an intrinsic part of the holistic curriculum that Hofstra seeks to provide our students.”

Formed by a group of faculty members over the last two years, the **Center for Civic Engagement (CCE)** officially debuted spring 2007 with its sponsorship of *Gandhi, King, Ikeda: A Legacy of Building Peace*. This inaugural event was an international peace exhibit at Hofstra that focused on Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Japanese peace activist Daisaku Ikeda, three individuals who promoted peace and social change through nonviolent action. In conjunction with the opening of the exhibit and

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sponsored by Soka Gakkai International and co-sponsored by Dr. King’s alma mater, Morehouse College, Hofstra presented a “Gandhi, King, Ikeda Award” to three local individuals dedicated to social justice work: Hofstra Professor Martin Melkonian; Margaret Melkonian, co-founder, board member and former executive director of the LI Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives; and local attorney Fred Brewington.

The CCE was founded on the following premises:

- ▶ Students who are engaged in their civic life are better satisfied with their lives and social environment, including their university experience.
- ▶ Those who learn about the satisfactions of civic engagement at a young age are likely to remain engaged, thus strengthening the democratic fabric.
- ▶ There are specific activities and skills that make for engaged citizens.
- ▶ These activities and skills can be encouraged and fostered through sustained deliberative and dialogic programs.
- ▶ Students equipped with civic engagement experiences and skills can effectively move from awareness to action.



Cynthia Bogard, Ph.D., director of the Center for Civic Engagement at Hofstra University, and Professor Michael D'Innocenzo, chairperson of the center's board of directors and the Harry H. Wachtel Distinguished Teaching Professor for the Study of Nonviolent Social Change, at the February 2, 2007 opening of the exhibit, *Gandhi, King, Ikeda: A Legacy of Building Peace*.

The CCE educates students about their own potential for civic engagement and about current and historical issues related to democracy. It promotes the prerequisites of democracy through educational programs that stress the importance and complex meanings of its central ideals, including freedom of civic speech and expression; respect for others (civic comportment); appreciation for diverse persons and viewpoints; reflection on the ethics of public issues and the importance of taking an active role in their resolution (civic mindedness); personal and group empowerment; social and economic equality; preservation of the environment; and the need to assure the equitable distribution of environmental resources across nations and generations.

“Our mission at the CCE is to help students see that civic involvement is not only necessary to maintain our democracy’s health, it can also be very personally rewarding,” Dr. Bogard says. “So education mixes with enjoyment in everything we try to do.”

To accomplish its goals, the center:

- ▶ Assists students in forming and strengthening groups, networks and organizations with civic engagement agendas.
- ▶ Helps students define, plan and carry out social actions and activities that promote active civic engagement.
- ▶ Assists students in developing social policy initiatives that are relevant to their needs as active citizens, including assisting in campus life satisfaction and improvement initiatives.
- ▶ Encourages students to connect as citizens to the larger local community.
- ▶ Fosters associations for civic ventures that can be shared across the generations (including involvement of Hofstra alumni).
- ▶ Encourages voter education, registration and voting, and active engagement in electoral politics such as lobbying and working on campaigns.
- ▶ Assists students in developing leadership skills and deliberative approaches to public policy.
- ▶ Works with students to help them find experiential learning opportunities, including internships that promote democracy and civic engagement.
- ▶ Helps students develop research skills so they can become citizens equipped with reliable information and be empowered to make sound judgments about the quality of the information they encounter.

The CCE was built upon years of work by Hofstra faculty with students on public policy issues. Michael D'Innocenzo, chairperson of the center's board of directors and Hofstra's Harry H. Wachtel Distinguished Teaching Professor for the Study of Nonviolent Social Change, has worked closely with the Kettering Foundation of Dayton, Ohio, since 1991, and has received leadership project support from the Herman Goldman Foundation of New York City. The Kettering Foundation is a research institute that works on public policy issues; the Goldman Foundation awards grants in health, social justice, education and the arts.

The following are some of the CCE's activities both before and after its official debut:

Day of Dialogue IV: USA and the World: Where Do We Go From Here? – This annual event consisted of a series of forums and workshops intended to inform students about public issues. Two of the major components of the March 14, 2007, event were:

- ▶ **Iraq – Hard Times and Hard Choices: Where Do We Go From Here?** – A special community forum marking the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq, which featured a wide range of experts, scholars and citizens. The forum was broadcast live by WRHU Radio Hofstra University and was open to the community.
- ▶ **The Energy Problem: Choices for an Uncertain Future** – A multigenerational forum looking at our dependence on foreign oil and alternatives for the future.

Last spring, the CCE sponsored a series of programs related to the promotion of peace and nonviolence:

- ▶ **The UN Peacekeeping Force: A Multinational Force Against War** – An address and discussion with Hernán Vales of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations.
- ▶ **Women Taking Action for Peace** – The program featured female activists working on issues ranging from the death penalty to the Palestinian conflict.
- ▶ **Racial and Ethnic Tensions; What Should We Do?** – A public intergenerational forum in association with National Issues Forums Institute.

Both students and alumni were engaged by the CCE. Hofstra student Maisie Osteen received a summer

2007 internship at the Kettering Foundation to work on research for a National Issues Forums Institute book titled *The Wealth Gap in America*. Alumni who are public high school teachers participated in the annual 2007 Kettering Foundation Public Policy Workshop in Ohio and will be associated with the CCE on future intergenerational projects and assisting young people in issue framing.

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The CCE additionally sponsors the following ongoing programs to promote civic engagement:

- ▶ **Local Focus Groups** – Hofstra, through the CCE, has provided focus groups for two national documentaries by the National Issues Forums Institute: *A Public Voice: Energy* (2007) and *Improving Democracy* (2006).
- ▶ **Leadership Training** – Ongoing student leadership training in deliberative

democracy moderation and conflict resolution, political and grassroots organizing, policy formulation and presentation, and voter registration and voting promotion campaigns.

▶ **Campus-Wide Advocacy** – In May 2007 the center posted a letter to the Hofstra community on its Web site, urging everyone to express their opinions on the war in Iraq and Afghanistan to their representatives, regardless of their views.

▶ **Student Voter Registration** – During summer 2007 the CCE was active at student orientations registering first-year students to vote in the 2008 presidential election.

“The CCE’s intergenerational forums and many of our other programs demonstrate through role-modeling how being interested in our nation’s future is necessary, interesting and enriching,” said Professor D’Innocenzo.



Hofstra students attend a program and performance about Guernica, a Spanish village bombed by Nazi Germany on April 26, 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, during Day of Dialogue V.

CCE Activities 2007-2008

September 19, 2007 - Student voter registration drive began. Co-sponsored by the local League of Women Voters chapter.

September 20, 2007 - “Multicultural Mixer” designed to expose students of different ethnic and religious backgrounds to one another.

October 2, 2007 - Hofstra celebrated the new United Nations holiday “International Day of Nonviolence” on Mahatma Gandhi’s birthday with a series of events.

October 2-29, 2007 - Exhibit on “Non-Military Approaches to Human Security.” Opened to the public.

October 24, 2007 - “Day of Dialogue V,” a daylong series of forums, workshops and performances intended to inform students about public issues.

October 25, 2007 - “Hispanic Heritage Month” celebration with Martin Espada, internationally known Latino poet.

November 2-3, 2007 - “Campus Camp Wellstone,” a two-day grassroots political organizing and leadership workshop offered by the Wellstone Action Foundation, founded in honor of the late senator from Minnesota, Paul Wellstone.

April 22, 2008 - Earth Day activities and programs highlighting environmental awareness.

CCE House - A residence hall for 55 students who chose to be part of a living experience with direct involvement in the democratic process and in social justice activities.

Crossing Borders Training - A series of events for Hofstra student leaders intended to foster sustained work and friendship between students of varying ethnic/religious/racial backgrounds is underway, in conjunction with Hofstra’s Diversity Task Force.

“International Scene” speaker series - Three programs titled: “Iraq; Should We Stay or Leave?”; “Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam”; and “Turmoil in the Mideast: Assessing the Role of Iran.”

“The Wealth Gap in America” - A series of intergenerational forums, presentations and discussions sponsored by the National Issues Forum Institute.

African Students Connection - The CCE is working toward building an ongoing relationship with students in the African nation of Togo.



Hofstra students celebrate free speech during Day of Dialogue V by speaking out on topics of their choice.