

**Civic Leadership Institute**  
*Civic Engagement & Contemporary Social Issues*  
**SYLLABUS**

**Course Description:**

News media and popular culture surround us with stories of violence, poverty, and urban decay. Political leaders exchange ideas about education, the economy, health care, and welfare reform. But what are all of these issues really about? What is life like for someone who is homeless or on welfare? Where have these problems come from? And most importantly, what can we do about them, as individual citizens and as a society? Civic Leadership Institute students, through an introductory course in *Civic Engagement & Contemporary Social Issues*, explore the complex challenges that affect our communities today, and are introduced to tools and strategies for community development and positive social change.

This innovative curriculum combines rigorous academic work with community service and experiential learning. Several times each week, students travel to varied neighborhoods throughout the Baltimore/DC metropolitan area to engage in service-learning projects with respected local community organizations, and to visit with key community leaders and important institutions. In addition to the core curriculum, students have the opportunity to engage in in-depth explorations of social issues of their choosing, through a Special Topic Seminar Series. Students also participate in an Evening Colloquium featuring outstanding guest speakers from a variety of fields, including political theorists, business leaders, local activists, and other people who are making an impact on their communities.

**Objectives:**

Civic Leadership Institute participants:

- explore the root causes of and potential solutions to specific social problems
- understand the individual and institutional stakeholders that make up a community
- discover how to identify and mobilize community assets
- gain exposure to a wide range of community development and leadership theories
- analyze case studies on effective social change throughout history
- examine what it means to be a citizen and a leader in today's complex world
- build concrete interpersonal and leadership skills, including communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and creative problem solving
- identify ways to become more active in their own schools and communities after the program concludes.

**Evaluation:**

Students are expected to attend and actively participate in all class meetings, and complete all readings, writing assignments, and group projects carefully and thoughtfully. Students will be evaluated based on participation in class and field experiences, individual work, and group projects. Rather than assign grades, our instructors write detailed evaluations providing feedback on each student's achievements in the course, and outlining areas for further growth.

**Resources:**

The primary text for this course is a course reader, which consists of a variety of articles by prominent scholars of sociology, political science, and education, as well as historical documents and media coverage of current issues and events. This course reader will be supplemented with additional articles and resource materials selected by instructors.

**Course Overview:**

**Week One**

Sunday: Beginning at the Beginning

- Introductions and icebreakers
- Review of syllabus

Monday: Introduction to Class and Community

- Representing & defining community
- Creating a classroom community
- About experiential education & service-learning
- Preparing for the field study
- Speaker: *Civic Engagement in the Local Community*

Tuesday: Introduction to Community (cont.)

- Field Experience: *Tour of City & Community Mapping Project*  
Driving tour of Baltimore and conversations with community residents
- Group presentations & reflection on community

Wednesday: Living Below the Poverty Line

- What is a social issue?
- Savage Inequalities reading & discussion
- Poverty in America
- Welfare budgeting exercise
- Special Topic Seminars
- Speaker: *Faces of Homelessness*

Thursday: Living Below the Poverty Line (cont.)

- Field Experience: *Hunger & Homelessness*  
Service project preparing and serving a meal at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen

Friday: Power, Privilege & Responsibility

- Global perspective on poverty
- Four corners debate
- A Class Divided
- Knapsack of Privilege reading & discussion
- What is our responsibility to address injustice?

**Week Two**

Sunday: Power, Privilege & Responsibility (cont.)

- Speaker: *Media & Social Responsibility*

Monday: Social Justice & Approaches to Change

- Field Experience: *Youth & Poverty*  
Service project working with youth at a school, summer camp, or enrichment program
- Reflection

Tuesday: Social Justice & Approaches to Change (cont.)

- Defining & envisioning social justice
- Mobilizing institutions to make change
- Introduction to government, business, media, nonprofits
- Special Topic Seminars

Wednesday: Politics & Advocacy

- Field Experience: *Washington, D.C.*  
Speaker on politics and homelessness  
Meeting with advocacy organization

Thursday: Leadership in Communities

- Exploring traditional notions of leadership
- Group challenge and discussion
- Philosophy of the servant leader

Friday: Building Stronger Communities

- Field Experience: *Innovative Approaches to Change*  
Service project with model nonprofit taking creative or innovative approach to change

### Week Three

Sunday: Building Stronger Communities (cont.)

- Speaker: *"What Next?" Workshops*

Monday: Community Development & Problem Solving

- Introduction to asset-based community development
- Personal asset maps
- Systematic steps to community problem solving

Tuesday: Community Development & Problem Solving (cont.)

- Field Experience: *Community Organizing & Development*  
Meeting/service project with grassroots community organizing or development agency
- Speaker: *Social Entrepreneurship*

Wednesday: Social & Political Action

- Brief history of social action
- Methods, tactics, strategies
- Making the choice to act
- Special Topic Seminars

Thursday: Bringing It Together

- Final project portfolio presentations
- Final reflection
- Finding hope

Friday: Wrapping Up

- Course evaluations
- Group affirmations
- Closing Ceremony