

CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE

FROM JAY A. PERMAN



Civic Education and the Academy

A lot of attention is paid to higher education's role in facilitating students' personal growth and preparing them for fulfilling careers. Both are important. But American higher education—especially *public* higher education—has a third role that flies under the radar. It shouldn't.

U.S. universities are anchors for democracy, responsible for producing citizens who can participate in advocacy and governance, in political and civic life. From the academy's earliest days in this country, this responsibility has been foundational to who we are and what we do: We educate for democracy. We provide the cultural and intellectual perspectives—the critical thinking skills—that enable our graduates to contribute as citizens and leaders, confident of their rights and prepared for their responsibilities.

Never has this work been more urgent. Democracy is under threat at home and abroad. Our democratic ideals are being eroded. We need a generation of citizens committed—and educated—to defend the principles on which this nation was built.



Foundational to the USM's mission is preparing students for civic life and social responsibility—preparing them to protect, and perfect, our American democracy.

Democracy is hard work. It's supposed to be. It's the work of continually remaking our nation. Our job at the USM is to make this hard work easier—to educate students for civic life, engage them in their communities, and secure our American democracy for generations to come.

One of the best indicators of success in this work is the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. This elective, voluntary classification acknowledges universities with an institutional focus on promoting civic education, preparing students for civic life, and strengthening our nation and its governance.

Three of our universities won the designation in the most recent cycle: Towson University, Salisbury University, and UMBC. In the next cycle, 2025, the vast majority of our universities—with support from the USM Office—will apply for it. Our goal is for every one of our universities to earn the Community Engagement classification, making us a community-engaged *System*.



A Vision of Civic Readiness

While civic readiness and social responsibility have always been central to our mission, our focus on them has grown sharper. In our strategic plan, [Vision 2030](#), we commit to integrating civic education throughout our general education curricula. Rather than requiring a single civics course for all students, this approach calls on our universities to incorporate elements of civic learning across all majors and degree programs, challenging students to become thoughtful consumers of news, to recognize and reject manipulation and misinformation, and to apply their fields of study to solve the very real crises we face—crises of sustainability and climate change, equitable health care and education, political and societal polarization.

We also commit in our strategic plan to enhancing civic engagement—because engagement is how we turn our civic education into action. It's how students come to more fully understand the work of citizenship. And so we pledge to support university-based practices that build a civic engagement infrastructure across the USM.

All of our universities center civic education and engagement in their programs. All work in partnership with their communities—local, national, and global. The universities that follow illustrate how creative leadership and collaboration foster curricular innovation in civic engagement, elevate the student experience, and graduate citizens prepared to protect and preserve American democracy and to confront through civic action the greatest challenges of our age.

Educating for Democracy

Salisbury University is a leader in integrating civic learning into its curricula and ensuring that all students have multiple opportunities to grow civically throughout their academic career.

Salisbury's new General Education program, launching with incoming students this fall, is a pathbreaker. All students will be required to complete at least one course tagged as fulfilling a Civic and Community Engagement requirement. Academic advisors will help students choose courses that meet this requirement while also satisfying another element of the General Education curriculum. These courses combine education in American history and government, skills development in bridge building and problem solving, and practical experience and projects.

For example, this fall, SU's Institute of Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE) will offer a one-credit lecture series exploring the role of governance, elections, and advocacy in democratic societies. Faculty will be able to integrate the lecture series into their existing courses to secure the Civic and Community Engagement tag.



Salisbury University students spend thousands of hours in community service each year, animating an SU mission and culture grounded in civic participation.

Of course, different disciplines will take a different approach to the content, but each will expand student access to high-quality civic and community engagement opportunities. This cross-curricular integration brings new voices into civic education and advances SU's efforts to inculcate an ethos of applied citizenship across the university.

To ensure that courses tagged as Civic and Community Engagement meet required learning outcomes, the university drew on best practices from leading civic engagement scholars, including two of its own: Dr. Alexander Pope, director of PACE, and Dr. Sarah Surak, former co-director and Senior PACE Fellow. In fact, Civic Engagement Across the Curriculum was born out of their work—a multiyear research project in which they collected and analyzed data on the delivery of curricular and co-curricular civic engagement programs.

But PACE’s work doesn’t stop at education. The institute has expanded SU’s AmeriCorps program, ShoreCorps, whose members serve a year with a nonprofit or government agency to meet critical community needs. That program is now the largest in Maryland.

For all of this and more, the American Democracy Project honored PACE with its 2023 We the People award for excellence in innovation.



Engaging Our Communities

Civic engagement is in the University of Baltimore’s DNA. Through the School of Law’s clinical law program, supervised students provide free legal assistance to low-income families, veterans, immigrants, and other high-need clients. UBalt’s College Readiness Academies and dual-enrollment initiatives have created college pathways for more than 5,000 Baltimore City high schoolers. And since 2016, UBalt’s Second Chance College Program has offered college courses and degrees to nearly 100 students incarcerated at the Jessup Correctional Institution.

And UBalt is a force for civic enrichment and the democratic process. The Campus Vote Project has named the university a Voter Friendly Campus every year since 2018. The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge—dedicated to nonpartisan civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation at U.S. colleges—gave UBalt its Gold and Platinum awards for excellence in democratic engagement.

These distinctions matter to UBalt Provost Ralph Mueller, who advocates for greater community engagement capacity at the university and formal recognition of its engagement initiatives. To that end, he's charged a task force to promote and coordinate strategic engagement activities across the UBalt campus. Under its co-chairs, Vice President for Student Success Nicole Marano and College of Public Affairs Dean Roger Hartley, what's emerging is a more intentional and structured commitment to developing mutually beneficial and reciprocal community partnerships benefiting UBalt students and Baltimore residents.

A good example of this is UBalt's partnership with state and local governments to support Gov. Moore's plan to bring more people—especially young people—into public service. The NextGen Leaders for Public Service program in UBalt's Schaefer Center for Public Policy prepares students from all majors to explore careers in public service. In less than two years, more than 200 students have been placed in paid internships or fellowships with the State of Maryland, the City of Baltimore, and municipalities across the state.

This is how UBalt intentionally invests in developing the next generation of public servants; how it lives the mission of a university not just located in, but *embedded* in, its community. As UBalt celebrates its centennial next year, this commitment—and its impact—will take center stage.



Every year, Towson University students converge on Annapolis for Tiger Pride Day. They meet with legislators, promote TU's work, and advocate for SGA-supported bills.

Shouldering Our Responsibility

These two strands—civic education and community engagement—are coming together in an exciting way at the University of Maryland, College Park. Through its curriculum, investments, and outreach, the university is using the civic-responsibility imperative to advance the public good.

With support from the USM and from PACE at Salisbury University, UMD has introduced Civic Engagement Across the Curriculum, a professional development program supporting the integration of civic engagement experiences into any course. The program is open to all faculty and staff, and requires no prior experience with civic engagement strategies or existing community partnerships. With asynchronous online courses, in-person seminars, and an active instructor learning

community, people across UMD—in academic and non-academic units—are fully engaged in the effort.

In 2022, UMD announced its Grand Challenges Grants Program, a university-wide commitment to tackling the world’s most complex problems. The following year, UMD invested an unprecedented \$30 million in the program to accelerate solutions. The grants support projects and programs designed to address enduring and emerging societal issues: climate change, social injustice, global health, education disparities, poverty, threats to our democracy.

UMD’s Maryland Democracy Initiative (MDI) was among the initial efforts funded by a Grand Challenges Grant. The MDI works to create a fairer and more just society by developing in all people the capacity for a lifetime of civic participation. It expands interdisciplinary, community-centered research about democracy and civic engagement; offers teaching and learning opportunities; and convenes civic engagement leaders and stakeholders. In its first year, MDI researchers are focused on voting rights and voter mobilization; strengthening local news coverage; the intersection of media, disinformation, and democracy; and improving information literacy among K–12 students.

And in a bid for transformational impact, UMD has established the Center for Community Engagement. On Aug. 1, Dr. Tania Mitchell will assume leadership of the center as UMD’s inaugural associate provost for community engagement. Her mission? Coordinate and grow the university’s extensive civic education and engagement efforts—encompassing community-engaged research, teaching, learning, and service—and ensure that engagement is woven into the fabric, values, and very identity of UMD.



The Do Good Institute in UMD’s School of Public Policy prepares students for social innovation and social impact throughout their lives.

Leading in Ways That Matter

To nurture these efforts—and many more across the USM—Vision 2030 compels the System to develop and financially support programs that foster civic participation among our students, faculty, and staff. The new Civic Education and Community Engagement Council (CECE) will lead this work. Made up of students, faculty, and student affairs staff from every USM university, the council

will promote cooperation between universities, share best practices in civic education and engagement, and issue annual reports on our progress.

The first item on the CECE agenda is implementing the USM's new Help America Vote College Program grant. With money coming from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, each of our universities will be able to incentivize students to be trained as poll workers for the upcoming election. UMD will take the lead in developing the training modules, in partnership with the Maryland State Election Commission, and all USM universities will host recruiting events to attract participants. Students who complete the training can work in any election precinct—and get paid to do it—so we'll prioritize student placements in Maryland counties without easy access to poll workers.

The point is not only to support transparency and confidence in the 2024 election, but to start students on a path of engaged citizenship over their lifetime. It's an opportunity to participate directly in the civic life of Maryland—the bedrock of our mission.

Another USM award incentivizing civic participation is the Langenberg Legacy Fellowship. Honoring USM Chancellor Emeritus Don Langenberg and funded through the Langenberg family, the fellowship supports student-led projects in civic engagement. With the support of faculty or staff sponsors, fellows tackle civic challenges on a small scale, promoting justice within their university communities.

The first two years of projects have taken on a broad range of issues, including early childhood education, integrating ex-offenders back into their communities, and sexual and reproductive health. Through workshops, symposia, and university-wide exhibitions, Langenberg Fellows are showing up for civic engagement in fresh and novel ways. And through the fellowship program, the USM is building a community of powerful and passionate civic leaders.



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