



Developing Civic Capacity for Equity and Social Justice

Civic Capacity is: the ability to make a difference, to have the knowledge, skills, and motivation to be an agent of change in the world.

Equity is: openness to people as they are, and to the realities and circumstances they bring to a situation, it means beginning an interaction by meeting people where they are at, and taking their needs seriously.

Social Justice is: the ideal of a world where everyone has an equal ability to realize their capacities.

To have civic capacity for equity and social justice means that we want our students to see themselves as active agents who have the skills and the motivation to act in these four areas of life to bring about outcomes where people are met where they are and treated with respect to be able to build a world in which people can realize their capacities.

There are many ways that we can help develop our students' civic capacity for social justice and equity. Here are some general ideas to spark thought:

As instructors we can:

1. Make linkages between our disciplinary content and the problems of the world, our local communities, and the lives of our students and possible solutions.
2. Model being engaged citizens. Our students will learn about being engaged world citizens from the way we model it.
3. Have students work on developing solutions to real world problems in their assignments in ways that are centrally related to course content.
4. Ask students to do some form of civic engagement as part of their course work. For example, we can ask students to engage in work that tries to solve a community problem

- or serve our community. We can help students understand the importance of their engagement and deepen content learning by asking them to reflect on what they learned.
5. Share with our students our own sense of the importance of being informed about the world by beginning classes with information from news sources about things that we are concerned about, even when these are not related to our curriculum.
 6. Talk to our students about the importance of keeping informed.
 7. Engage in activities that develop a sense of agency in our students. This can be accomplished by asking them to do complex tasks that require creative problems solving and pursuing their own interests and passions.
 8. Encourage thoughtful and respectful debate and dialogue.
 9. Remind ourselves to remain curious about the world and willing to accept new ways of learning.
 10. Encourage our students to develop strong social bonds with each other across differences and in ways that create community in the classroom.
 11. Invite organizers and activists to speak to students to demystify the process of social change.
 12. Create an environment where students feel free to ask lots of questions.
 13. Discuss the social construction and history of the disciplines so students understand the politics involved in the recreation and dissemination of knowledge.

As administrators we can:

1. Work to foster a campus culture where employees and students value civic engagement, by supporting civic engagement and community service initiatives.
2. Work to foster a campus where people feel that their voice matters and where there is an opening to hearing the voices of people not in the normal chain of command, and where the projects initiated by members of the community are taken seriously and acted upon.
3. Provide professional development to faculty and staff that supports civic capacity for equity and social justice.

As classified staff we can:

1. Attend to the human relationships in our work area and encourage people to take initiative with civic engagement in mind. We can include students as creative agents in our work areas by letting them take initiative and solve problems themselves.
2. We can think of the environmental, social, and cultural implications of choices we make in our work.

Cynthia Kaufman, Director, Institute of Community and Civic Engagement. De Anza College 10/13. You are welcome to use and repurpose this document for any non-commercial purpose.