

- Small words matter. Through our work in CSL over the years, “with” is a very important small word. Rather than doing things “for” the community, we strive to partner “with” community organizations to identify strategies and reach common goals. As we move forward in identifying strategic plans for student success, let’s keep “with” at the forefront of our thinking.

Our campus success in terms of community engagement is built largely upon working with students as well as each other (community members, faculty, and staff). But it is often the creativity and commitment of the students that has shaped and sustained effective programs over time. Through the [Sam H. Jones Community Service Scholarship Program](#), students tutor and mentor youth, plan service events and trips, and support the implementation of community-based teaching or research. We annually recognize exceptional talent through the William M. Plater Medallion, yet countless students are to be applauded.

Faculty and staff who work with [Service Learning Assistants](#) have a unique opportunity. Research indicates that the college years are instrumental to confirming a sense of civic identity (Knefelkamp, 2008; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Many students are looking for “civic mentors” just as they are looking for “career mentors.” As they interact with you as a civic-minded professional, a public scholar, or an engaged engineer or scientist or nurse or accountant or artist or historian . . . or . . . students gain insight into the public purposes of their education.

What can you do as you work with students to develop their civic identity? Here are three quick tips:

1. **Ask about their civic imagination:** Ask students how they envision improving the world—and connect them to others who have similar interests;
2. **Create dialogue:** Research indicates that students who “dialogue across difference with others who are different than me” report significant growth in civic outcomes (Keen & Hall, 2008); and
3. **Tell stories:** Both informal and formal storytelling is a basis for deep learning (McDrury & Alterio, 2003), so share your stories and ask students to do the same.

We want to work “with” you to cultivate civic-minded graduates. If your civic imagination identifies new partnerships or programs to include in strategic planning, let us know how we can assist. Cheers to the start of a meaningful semester!

References:

Keen, C., & Hall, K. (2008). Post-graduation service and civic outcomes for high financial need students of a multi-campus, co-curricular service-learning college program. *Journal of College and Character*, 10(2), 1–15.

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McDrury, J. & Alterio, M. (2003). *Learning through storytelling in higher education: Using reflection and experience to improve learning*. London, UK: Kogan Page.

Youniss, J., McLellan, J., & Yates, M. What we know about engendering civic identity. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 1997, 40(5), 620–31.