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REPORT FOR THE CITY OF GUELPH: ENGAGING POST- SECONDARY STUDENTS IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

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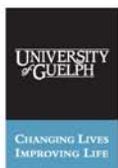
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INTRODUCTION

THE CURRENT PROJECT

The Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/Research Shop, University of Guelph, has undertaken a research project on behalf of the City of Guelph to explore leading practices of engaging university and college students in municipal government. The purpose of this report is to review and summarize information on various leading practices gathered from the websites of Ontario municipalities, including Kingston, London, Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, Waterloo and Kitchener. The online search was further expanded to include some of the activities and initiatives that have occurred in national and international post-secondary institutions. A few relevant academic literature and grey literature articles are also included in the report to supplement the information.

While strategic plans and toolkits developed to engage youth are readily available online (e.g. Halifax Youth Engagement Toolkit), and the concept of youth advisory councils are not new (Matthews, 2003), there are fewer online resources on engaging post-secondary students in the forms of a strategic plan or toolkit. As mentioned by the City of London's Manager of Corporate Initiatives, municipal activities and initiatives to engage post-secondary students are often quite decentralized (personal communication, April 2, 2014). Town and gown committees and university/college initiatives to integrate teaching, research and service are often the means through which to engage post-secondary students in local community issues. Post-secondary institutions may also offer degrees, diplomas or courses in civic engagement. Below are some of the initiatives that are found in various municipalities. These initiatives could be considered to fall under one of the two categories of campus-community partnership initiatives or local government initiatives. Campus-community partnership initiatives include town and gown committee, community events and symposia, initiatives to provide a collaborative common space, and initiatives to integrate teaching, research and service functions at the post-secondary institution. In terms of local government initiatives, mentoring and internship programs are the most common means to provide learning opportunities and work experience with regard to municipal politics to post-secondary students.



CAMPUS-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES

1. TOWN AND GOWN COMMITTEE

Based on phone conversations with staff members of the City of Waterloo and the City of London and an online search of the Ontario municipalities, town and gown committee emerges as the forum whose purpose is to enhance meaningful relationship and improve communication between the local post-secondary institution(s), the local government and the community, and to integrate the post-secondary educational sector into the community. The expression, “town and gown”, invokes the “Ivory Tower” image of higher education and the historical relationship of the community (town) and the university (gown) as distinct and isolated spheres, often implying conflict between the two (Fox, 2014; Martin, Smith, & Phillips, 2005; Mayfield, 2001). Town and gown committees have thus been established in Canadian, American and European cities to deal with conflict between students and local residents on issues related to student housing, poor property maintenance and standards, noise and late night activity, among others. These committees become the coordinating body to address neighbourhood issues of shared concerns, promote and work towards collaborative and inclusive solutions, establish working groups or sub-committees to complete specific projects or initiatives, liaison with other municipal advisory committees, and advocate for the inclusion of a town and gown vision in municipal strategic planning (e.g. the committees of London, Kingston, and Waterloo).

Membership Structure

Town and gown committee membership usually consists of senior administrators and undergraduate and graduate student representatives of the local post-secondary institution(s); City Councillor, Chief Administrator Officer and other senior administrative members of the local government; and residents from the community. Committee may be established between the community and one or more local post-secondary educational institutions. For example, the Waterloo Town and Gown Committee includes representatives from the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College. The London Town and Gown Committee includes the University of Western Ontario and Fanshawe College. On the other hand, the Kingston Town and Gown Committee is established between Queen’s University and the City of Kingston. Committees may also be localized to address issues of a specific region in the city. The Sandy Hill Town and Gown Committee, launched in 2012, is established between the



University of Ottawa, the City of Ottawa and the community of Sandy Hill, and is limited thus far to a particular neighbourhood rather than being a city-wide initiative

Functions

In addition to promoting a two-way dialogue between the post-secondary institution(s) and the community, and addressing neighbourhood issues between students and local residents, town and gown committees also work to welcome students and make them feel like being part of the community. The committees help organize activities for homecoming week, encourage students to volunteer at community events, and connect students to local public services. For example, the Waterloo Town and Gown Committee is involved in creating, distributing and evaluating online surveys to find out what students want to know about the City and how to ease their integration into the community. The City along with the Committee will then organize and deliver informational sessions based on the feedback from the surveys (Commissioner of Community Services, personal communication, March 28, 2014).

Another important function of the town and gown committees is to organize working groups or sub-committees to address key areas that have an impact on the town and gown relationships. For example, the Kingston Town and Gown Strategic Plan identifies four key priority areas and establishes working groups that serve under the direction of the Strategic Leadership Team:

- A. The Quality of Life Working Group focuses on living conditions and housing standards, neighbourhood beautification and cleanliness, personal safety and property security, and the environment and social cohesion;
- B. The Community Planning Working Group works to shape and advance built environment policy initiatives and create partnerships that will lead to more sustainable and equitable communities, integrate university expansion with urban planning, and improve recreational and cultural opportunities;
- C. The Student Engagement Working Group focuses on connecting students with the community, promotes two-way communication and marketing campaigns that help students establish roots, communicate about student safety, and raise awareness of post-graduate career opportunities;



- D. The Economic Development Working Group works with local and regional strategic partners and business communities to develop and promote the local economy¹. Thus, as noted by Fox (2014), while town and gown committees may have arisen out of crisis and conflict between students and local residents, the campus-community relationship model of the 21st century has evolved into one which implements a broad strategy of community engagement and planning.

2. COMMUNITY EVENTS AND SYMPOSIA

Community events and symposia provide opportunities to bring together members of post-secondary institution(s), community leaders, and service providers to exchange knowledge, discuss community issues, and work towards collaborative and inclusive solutions. The Town and Gown Association of Ontario (<http://www.tgao.ca/>) organizes an annual symposium that takes place at various member municipalities and features key speakers on issues such as off-campus housing, breaking down barriers between students and communities, and enhancing university-community relationships. Another example is the Think Tank on Campus-Community Engaged Scholarship, a three-day event organized by the School of Nursing at McMaster University to discuss priority issues in neighbourhoods and to develop guiding principles on how the University and the broader community could work together effectively. The event brought together resident leaders from the neighbourhoods of Crown Point, McQuesten and South Sherman; representatives from the City's Neighbourhood Development Strategy; community service providers; and McMaster faculty, staff and students². In addition, City staff may also present information as guest speakers in classroom settings about the City and local community issues. These presentations can be tailored accordingly to the level and discipline of the students (City of Waterloo, personal communication, March 28, 2014).

¹ The Kingston Town and Gown Strategic Plan is accessible online at https://www.cityofkingston.ca/documents/10180/14469/Plan_TownGown.pdf/2cbbf681-b9e0-4b1a-b996-85d3e84c0d71

² Information on the Think Tank event at McMaster is available online at <http://fwi.mcmaster.ca/story/priority-neighbourhoods-key-for-mcmaster/>



3. COLLABORATIVE COMMON SPACE

There are initiatives that have been created to provide a common meeting space for members of the educational sector and the local community, although not for the specific purpose of engaging post-secondary students in local community issues or local government processes. For example, The Action Research Common Hamilton (ARCH) is a McMaster initiative to create a collaborative work and meeting space for students, researchers and local residents to help build capacity for community-engaged research in Hamilton. It provides a 600-square-foot office space through a partnership between the School of Graduate Studies at McMaster University and Homestead Christian Care³.

4. INTEGRATION OF TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE

Martin and colleagues (2005) propose that university-community partnerships in the U.S.A have been facilitated through seven broad categories:

1. Service learning involves university initiatives to engage student in community learning and service activities as part of their regular coursework.
2. Service provision involves faculty and student initiatives of coordinated, sustained and long-term projects targeted toward specific communities, neighbourhoods or groups.
3. Faculty involvement takes the form of individual initiatives where faculty members become the driving force behind particular community activities.
4. Student volunteerism involves student engagement in community activities on an individual and voluntary basis separate and apart from service learning initiatives.
5. Community in the classroom initiatives involve the design of university courses that enhance community building and community capacity. These initiatives allow students to apply theoretical concepts to real world problems and solutions while gaining academic credit (Fox, 2014).

³ Information about the ARCH can be found on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Action-Research-Commons-Hamilton/341920035947023>



6. Applied research involves faculty and students in data collection, analysis, and reporting of community issues.
7. Major institutional change initiatives involve internal organizational cultural changes within the universities/colleges in order to promote university-community engagement.

Examples of initiatives that fall within one or more of these categories are abundant in Canadian and international post-secondary institutions. For example:

- A service learning course with graduate students and grassroots urban planning with youth took place at Salt Lake City's Westside, which involved University of Utah graduate students, high school students and community partners to address the concerns of youth in the planning of the underserved neighbourhood (Senbel, 2007). Graduate students and high school students worked together to build relationship and rapport, collaborated on a variety of tasks, participated in a community design workshop, and made presentations to two community councils about their work.

Below are some other examples of student-focused initiatives that promote student innovation, participation, and action in the local community:

- The Pond-Deshpande Centre (PDC) at the University of New Brunswick has a Student Ambassador Program (<http://www.ponddeshpande.ca/student-ambassadors/>) for students who are passionate about entrepreneurship and want to champion the entrepreneurial culture in New Brunswick.
- The University of California Berkeley Public Service Center (<http://publicservice.berkeley.edu/>) sponsors social action programs that are co-led by students and professional staff, and works to promote long-term collaborative relationships between the university and the community, provide experiential learning grounded in community issues, and empower student agency in taking action.

An example of an individual student innovation that was endorsed by a local government is the HotSpot Parking Pilot launched by the City of Fredericton. HotSpot Parking is a mobile app developed by an engineering student at the University of New Brunswick that allows users to pay and top up their parking time by using their cell



phones⁴. The local government may also engage post-secondary students in specific initiatives that the Corporate office is undertaking. The City of London produced a video in 2013 that showcases the diversity of jobs and employees in the Corporation and its mission to deliver services that contribute to the quality of life in London. The video, *At Your Service*, was produced in partnership with Fanshawe College's Advanced Filmmaking, Audio Post Production, Music Arts and Visual Effect/Editing Programs, and features original music that was written and produced by the students⁵.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT MENTORING AND INTERNSHIP INITIATIVES

Local government initiatives to engage university and college students often take the form of mentoring and internship programs. These programs incorporate a work experience component and leadership skills training. They also serve to educate interns about municipal government processes. Some of the programs aim to promote political participation of groups that are under-represented in local government, promote workplace diversity and inclusion, and/or ease the transition of recent graduates into the workplace. It should be noted, however, that these programs are limited in terms of the number of interns that can be enrolled in the programs and attract mainly students who already have an interest in learning more about local government operations. Below are some examples of local government mentoring and internship programs, whose information is available online:

CITY OF TORONTO'S REGIONAL CHAMPION CAMPAIGN (PROMOTE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS)

<http://www.toronto.ca/regional-champions/index.htm>

The program aims to increase women's participation in municipal politics. It is a part-time mentoring, job shadowing and education program in which young women, who are between the ages of 19 to 26, are matched with Toronto's women councillors to gain insight into the work and experiences of a city councillor and local government operations. Applicants do not have to be a post-secondary student to apply. Many of the

⁴ Information on Fredericton HotSpot Parking Pilot:

<http://www.fredericton.ca/en/transportation/hotspotparkingpilot.asp>

⁵ Information on the London *At Your Service* video:

<https://www.london.ca/newsroom/Pages/At-Your-Service-Video.aspx>



program protégées, however, are pursuing an undergraduate, a graduate or a professional degree.

CITY OF LONDON'S PAID INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (PROMOTE WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AND EASE TRANSITION INTO WORKPLACE)

<https://www.london.ca/newsroom/Pages/Paid-Internship-Program.aspx>

The program provides six internships of four-month duration annually to new immigrants and persons with disabilities, who have graduated from a recognized post-secondary institute or the Canadian equivalent, and recent local post-secondary graduates with limited work experience in their field. The program aims to increase the interns' job readiness and marketability, provide exposure to the work culture, and build skills, knowledge and professional networks. It also provides the City an opportunity to attract and engage new talent while securing more human resources for ongoing projects and tasks.

MAYOR'S OFFICE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

These programs are found in the United States and recruit graduate-level students and/or senior-level undergraduates. Aside from working on projects under the direction of city staff, the programs often incorporate career development and leadership skills training, as well as team building and networking activities. Examples include:

- **City of Philadelphia's Mayor's Internship Program**

<http://www.phila.gov/experiencephila/mayor.html>

The program offers work experience and learning opportunity about local government operations in various departments across the City for graduate-level students or undergraduates who will have completed their sophomore year by the start of the program. It is an unpaid 10-week summer internship with a commitment of 25 hours per week, and may work in conjunction with programs under which students earn academic credit or work study participation that is subsidized by the university or college. The program has 3 components: 1) A Work component of about 20 hours per week in which interns are assigned to a department for the duration of the program; 2) An Exploring Government component in which interns attend speaker events, visit municipal operations and programs, and participate in leadership development training; and 3) A Group Project component in which interns are assigned into groups to analyze and develop strategies to address an interdepartmental issue. Each group produces a short



white paper outlining the issue and the proposed strategies and presents their findings to the City's Executive Team by the end of the program.

- **City of Chicago's Mayor's Office Fellowship Program**

http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/mayor/supp_info/mayorsfellows.html

The program offers graduate-level students from all disciplines work experience and learning about local government operations and policy making. Fellows are selected on a nationwide basis, but local residency is required prior to starting the fellowship. Fellows are paid at a rate of \$20 per hour.

- **Baltimore City Mayoral Fellowship**

<http://www.baltimorecity.gov/OfficeoftheMayor/MayoralInitiatives/MayoralFellowship.asp>
[X](#)

The program offers undergraduates, who have completed their junior year, a 10-week, full-time summer placement. Fellows receive stipends and are placed in agencies based on their background, interests and the needs of the agencies and departments. Fellows are assigned to projects under the direction of senior level government officials. Other activities of the program include participation in weekly brownbag lunches with cabinet members, corporate executives, and community leaders, and working in a team to produce a newsletter highlighting each week's activities. By the end of the program, fellows will make presentations before the Mayor and cabinet on their experiences and complete a written report documenting their research, solutions and next steps.

CONCLUSION: KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN ENGAGING STUDENTS

In conclusion, the engagement of university and college students in local government takes the form of campus-community partnership initiatives or local government initiatives to provide mentoring and internship programs. Often, campus-community partnership initiatives engage students to address local community issues rather than to provide education and learning about municipal politics and civic engagement (with the exception of university/college courses or programs designed to provide such education). Below are some of the key considerations when engaging students in local community issues:



- Post-secondary students should be recognized for their **diversity** in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disciplines and interests, levels of education, among many other factors.
- The history of town and gown relationships speaks to the necessity of being inclusive wherein university and college students are **considered as members of the community** rather than troublesome transient residents (Fox, 2014). Activities and initiatives to welcome students to the community, connect students to local public services, raise awareness about personal and community safety, improve neighbourhood relationships, and provide opportunities for student participation in local community issues are important to make students feel like being a part of the local community. Town and gown committees have often been used as a forum for connecting and engaging students with the local community in various municipalities.
- **A collaborative and coordinated multi-agency approach** is considered necessary for the success of any advisory committee that involves youth or students. Furthermore, the participation of youth and students on advisory committees (e.g. youth councils, town and gown committees) should be valued with their views being listened to and taken seriously. Their roles and responsibilities on the committee should also be made clear with appropriate feedback and good support mechanisms. Matthews (2001) argued that many youth councils in the UK are flawed and often obscure the voices of young people in local decision making because of poor participatory mechanisms. Senbel (2007, p. 459) advocated that youth engagement “is not simply a call for involving youth for their own benefit... engage youth for our own benefit as a society that is struggling to generate widespread civic engagement.” The view of youth as a valuable asset to be mobilized and the call for genuine engagement of youth might be extended to the engagement of post-secondary students in local community issues and local decision-making.
- Membership on an advisory committee is often selected or self-selected. As noted by Matthews (2001) about youth council membership, it is impossible to claim that youth members are representative of the diversity of their group. The same might be argued for committees involving university and college students. Care should be taken to recruit widely in order to **be more inclusive** and not to marginalize “the silent majority” or groups that are often under-represented in decision-making.



- Students have to juggle between multiple commitments and activities, including those in their education and personal life. They thus may be able to participate only on a limited basis. For any committee that involves students, recruitment strategies should be in place to encourage the involvement of new members.
- Local government initiatives in the form of mentoring and internship programs are often limited in terms of the number of intern positions available and may attract mainly students who already have an interest in local government processes.



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON TOWN AND GOWN RELATIONSHIPS

International Town & Gown Association: <http://www.itgau.org/>

Town & Gown Association of Ontario: <http://www.tgao.ca/>