



**DONNELLY  
COLLEGE**  
EST. 1949

# **Student Growth through Civic Engagement: Increasing Persistence in First-Generation College Students**

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**Donnelly College**

**Kansas City, Kansas**

**HLC Conference April 2021**



**1.C. The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.**



## Primary research question:

- To what extent does participation in civic engagement activities (civic values, civic engagement, civic action) increase retention and graduation rates, and improve GPA of first-generation college students?

**Criterion 1.C.1**  
**The institution encourages curricular or cocurricular activities that prepare students for informed citizenship and workplace success.**



## ABOUT US

- **Small, Catholic, Liberal Art & Sciences College Enrollment under 500 students**
- **Mission, Vision, and Values insist upon Civic Engagement**
- **Located in the urban core of Kansas City, Kansas**
- **HSI/MSI designations**

# BEST COLLEGES

& WORLD REPORT  
**U.S. News**

RANKINGS

Ethnic Diversity on Campus **Ranked #1**

\*Economic Diversity on Campus **Ranked #3**

Least Debt upon Graduation **Ranked #3**



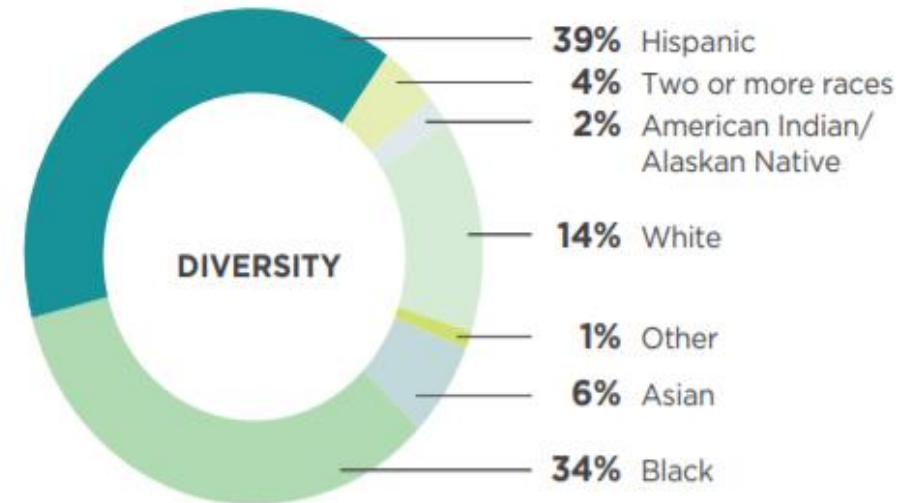
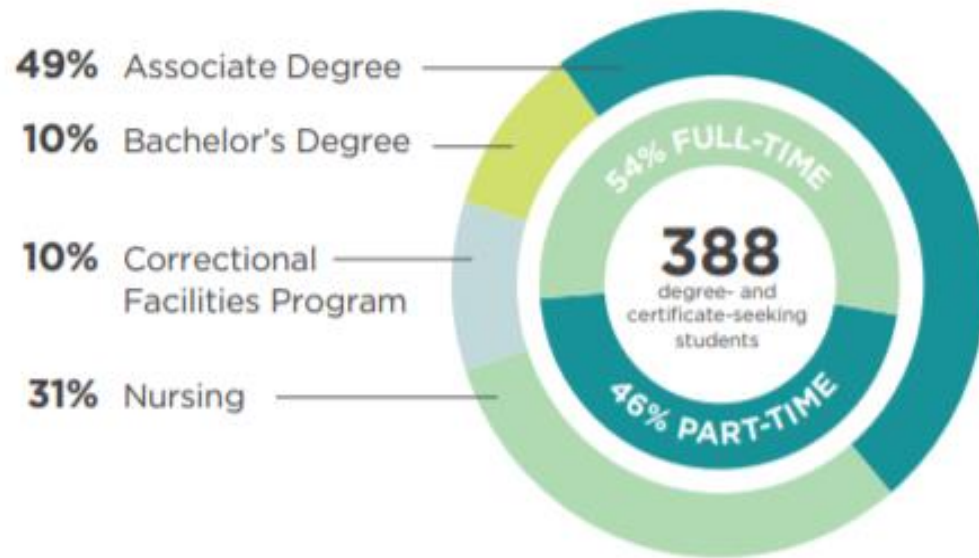
Midwest Region



**1.C.2 The institution's processes and activities demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations.**

- **HLC ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021**

## PROGRAM ENROLLMENT



Nearly 90% of American Indian, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino students said that they are more likely to complete a college degree after participating in service-learning. (Perez, Espinosa, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes, 2010)

# FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS:

- ...We can expect that **first-generation students** will likely experience college environments differently than their continuing-generation peers in terms of engagement in and out of the classroom and satisfaction with campus services, and hence may report different outcomes. (Dong, 2019)

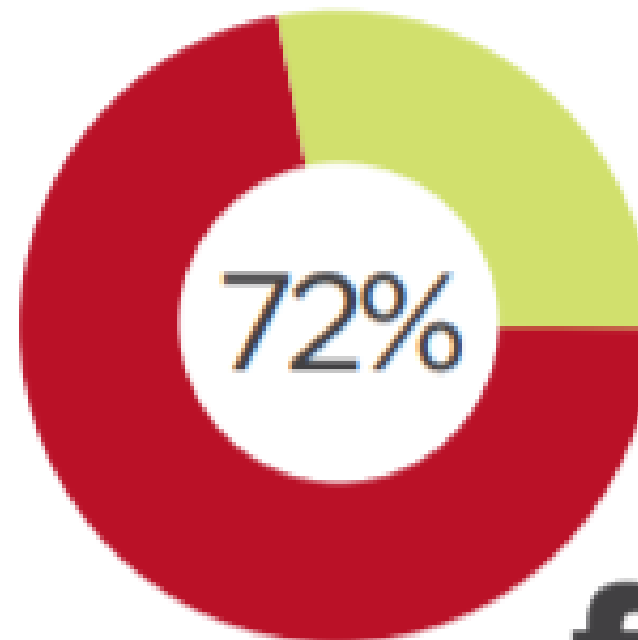






**1.C.3 The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.**

Curricular and Co-curricular decisions are based on our demographics



**first  
generation  
college students**

Almost twice as high as other four-year institutions nationally

**STUDENTS**[Log In](#)[Student Services](#)[Career Services](#)[Campus Ministry](#)[Counseling Center](#)[Campus Life](#)[Donnelly Dragons](#)[Financial Aid and Scholarships](#)[Academic Resources](#)[Academic Calendar](#)[Catalog](#)**First-Generation Faculty and Staff**

Feel free to reach out to these faculty and staff, who were first-generation college students and have volunteered to share their experiences.

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# Provide Resources for First Generation College Students

- Faculty and Staff of the College who were also first-generation can be a valuable resource for our students.

# First Generation Best Practices

Provide resources for self-care

Offer campus work opportunities

Encourage the use of low-cost textbooks <https://openstax.org/>

Teach study skills

Fight Invisibility

**Civic Engagement in curricular/co-curricular activities for sense of belonging.**

Provide Financial support

Best Practices  
(Standlee, 2018)



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## Donnelly College/KU Costa Rica January 2020

- Research has shown that, for first-generation students, the motivation to enroll in college is a deliberate attempt to improve their social, economic, and occupational standing (Ayala and Striplen, 2002).

# What is Civic Engagement?

- Thomas Ehrlich describes it this way: "**Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes**" (2000, vi).

# Benefits of Civic Engagement

- Research has shown that youth civic engagement is positively correlated with good attendance, **higher grade point average**, higher self-esteem, higher academic self-efficacy, involvement in extracurricular activities and **motivation to learn.** (Eccles & Barber, 1999)



Why is civic engagement so educationally effective?



## Civic Engagement: Service Learning

- **Service-learning has a positive effect on reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural and racial understanding.**
- **Service-learning has a positive effect on students' sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, interpersonal development, ability to work well with others, spiritual and moral development, and leadership and communication skills.**
- **Service-learning improves student satisfaction with college, and students engaged in service-learning are more likely to graduate.**
- **Service-learning has a positive effect on social responsibility and citizenship skills.**

Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray (2001)

## Community Connections reflective of familial and cultural heritage

To be effective, civic engagement must be intentionally integrated into curricular and cocurricular learning goals.





# Pedagogy

- We are prudently examining the number of civic engagement opportunities on campus, starting with the Freshman Day of Service, and culminating with Capstone projects.
- Donnelly's Student Services department which is part of TRIO, features a "structured freshman year" which includes academic support, STEM labs, tutoring, and counseling services to its 72% first generation students.
- CURRICULAR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:
- Project LOUD-Literacy Outreach in Urban Districts-Our developmental reading and writing students read to elementary school students.
- Unbound: Our ESL students respond to "adopted" children in their native language.
- Biology: Water testing at Big Eleven Lake in conjunction with our Common Read "What the Eyes Don't See."

# Faculty/Staff Responses To Curricular/Co- Curricular Civic Experiences

## **“There is no time”**

- Current research indicates that structured academic first year programs can enrich student persistence particularly for low-income, first-generation students. (Thayer, 2000)

## **“It is not in the budget”**

- Student Life departments and faculty release time can manage the program at small colleges .

## **“This is not Standard Operating Procedure”**

- Like other areas of focus, you must change the culture of the college. Consider a strategic plan initiative for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management.

# Faculty/Staff Responses To Curricular/Co- Curricular Civic Experiences

## **“It is too much extra work”**

- Civic Engagement is both a goal and a process. The goal of civic engagement is to address public concerns and promote the quality of the community. It’s also a process in which people take collective action to address issues of public concern

## **“Prove it works”**

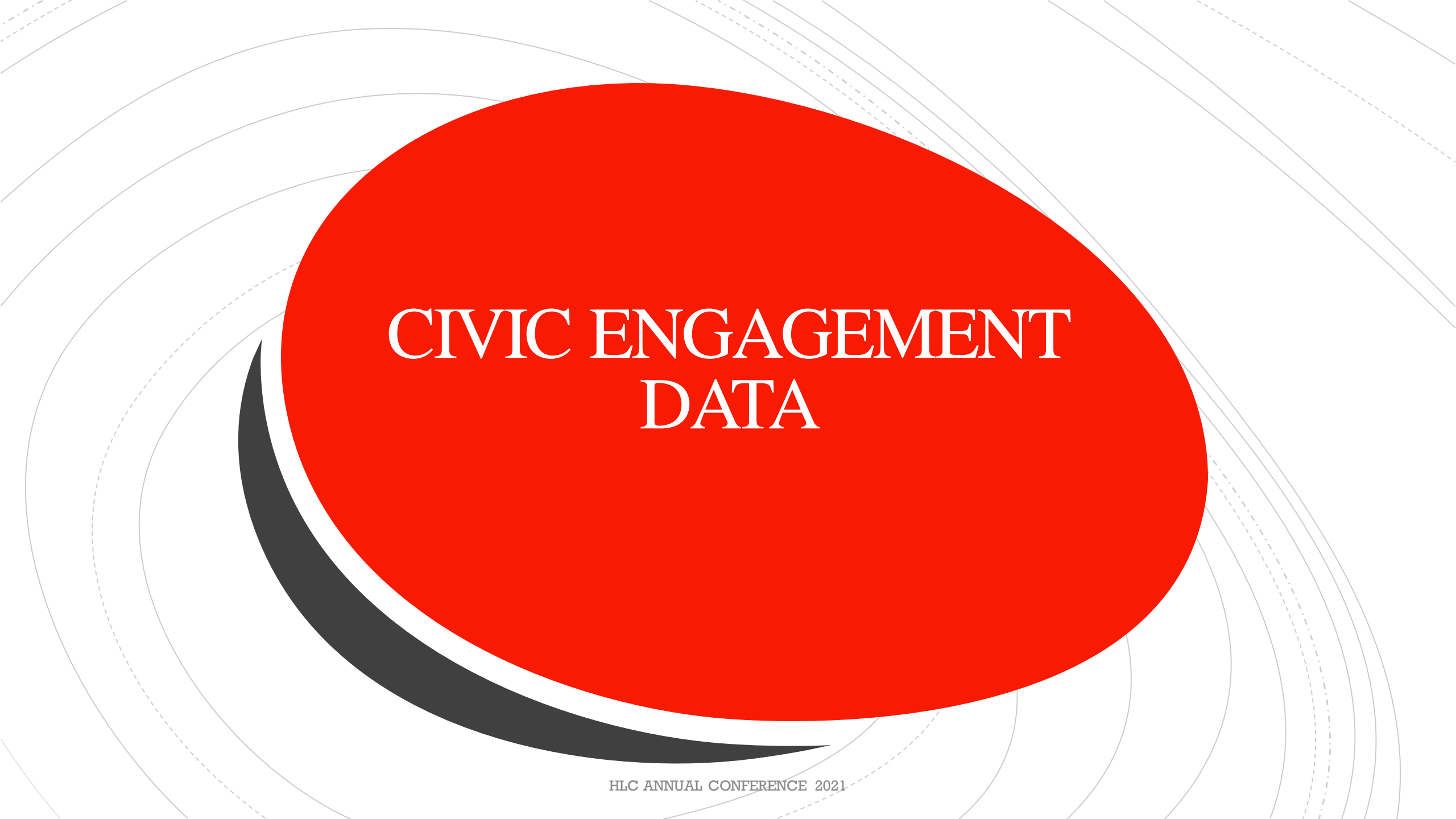
- Data speaks volumes! Rely on your IR Director to provide the data for what you are already accomplishing on campus.



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## Primary research question:

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# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DATA

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*The greatest gains in retention rates will result from focusing not only on the selection process, but also the student-environment interaction after college entry (Thayer, 2000)*

### **Fall to Fall Persistence**

- In a cohort of 272 students, 82% of students who participated in Civic Engagement events, to persisted to the following fall, compared to only 45% of students who did not participate in Civic Engagement events.

### **Fall to Spring Persistence**

- In the same cohort of 272 students. 82% of students who participated in Civic Engagement events returned the following semester, compared to only 63% of students who did not participate in Civic Engagement Events.





# GRADUATION RATES

- In a cohort of 189 students, 82% of students who participated in Civic Engagement events graduated on time, compared to 24% of students who did not participate in Civic Engagement events.

# GPA



Students who participated in Civic Engagement events had an average fall GPA of 2.73, higher than the average of ALL students, 2.08

Students who participated in civic engagement activities in their **first semester** had an average GPA of 2.73 compared to those who did not participate had a GPA of 1.98

Students who participated in civic engagement activities in their **second semester** had an average GPA of 3.11 compared to those who did not participate had a GPA of 2.57

# Campus-wide Civic Engagement

Engage the entire campus in civic engagement processes and practices. Criterion 1.C.


- **Financial Aid-FAFSA** Parent nights in Spanish/English
- **Business Office-Parent Engagement**, F-1 student education
- **Marketing-Social Media**
- **Advancement-Fundraising**, grant writing
- **Career Services-Diversity Preparation for the Workplace**
- **Campus Cupboard-Survey of Food Insecurity**
- **Library Services-Diversity Collection**

Resource:  
Civic  
Engagement by  
discipline

<https://www.donnelly.edu/explore/files/Documents/Civic%20Engagement%20by%20discipline.pdf>

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Thank you for joining today's virtual  
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*Student Growth through Civic  
Engagement: Increasing persistence of  
First-Generation College Students.*