

Bard CCE Podcast

00:00 Josh: Welcome everyone, to the next edition of our podcast series! Today we'll be talking about the Center for Civic Engagement here at Bard. I'm Josh Tyler, and as always, I'm joined by the Director of Admission, Mackie Siebens.

00:11 Mackie: Hello everyone! As Josh said, I'm Director of Admission, my name is Mackie Siebens, and I'm an alum. We're joined today by Sarah deVeer who's going to talk to us a little bit about the Center for Civic Engagement.

00:24 Sarah: Hi everyone! As Mackie said, my name is Sarah deVeer, I'm also an alum, class of 2017, and I currently work at the Bard Center for Civic Engagement as the Outreach Coordinator and Special Events Administrator.

00:39 Mackie: Sarah, we're going to start with the first question, which is what exactly is the mission of the Center for Civic Engagement and how did the Center come to be?

00:49 Sarah: So, the mission of the Center for Civic Engagement is to connect Bard Annandale students with the outside world. And what the outside world could mean a lot of different things, that could mean the local community here in Dutchess County, the Hudson Valley, that could mean regionally, so connecting students with opportunities in New York City, DC, throughout our early college network. That can also mean internationally. So, we believe that even though we are a private college, that the Center for Civic Engagement as well as the Bard institution in general, is working within the public good. And so, the Center for Civic Engagement kind of puts that work and that public good work, that rests in this private institution to use and brings ideas, especially ideas that are bred and initiated from our student body, brings those ideas into fruition.

1:45 Josh: Great. So what kind of ideas and programs and initiatives are you currently involved in at CCE?

1:52 Sarah: Right now, it's November, and so we're already thinking ahead to continuing the First Year Experience. So, in the past, with Language & Thinking, 2019, we led a bunch of different programs to further orient the current first year class towards all those different initiatives before as I mentioned, but specifically within their new home, within the Hudson Valley, within northern Dutchess County, and we're continuing that in January 2020, with the Citizen Science program as a part of that First Year Experience. And so, I, as well as my team in general, Erin Cannan, who's the Vice President of Student Affairs, and my student leaders, we're embarking on creating the different lesson plans that are going into use for one of the tracks of Citizen Science. And if you don't know too much about Citizen Science, that's okay, you'll learn all about it shortly, but essentially, it's been restructured to be choose-your-own-adventure, and one of those adventures is the Education Track, which I help coordinate. And so right now we're developing lesson plans that the Education Track, the first years will be doing, and working with the local eighth graders, as well as in the Citizen Science program, an expectation of the program is that we hope and expect all first years to participate in MLK Day of Engagement. And that engagement can look like a lot of different types of engagement. It could look like external engagement, like what you probably imagine when you think of volunteering such as going to a local food pantry, or helping out at Habitat for Humanity. But it can also look like internal engagement, how are you knowing your own human rights within this country, how are you protecting your neighbor, how are you developing that? How are you knowing your history, the history of civil rights? The history of human rights in general, within this country, within this world? How are you continuing to strengthen your active listening skills? Your empathetic speech? That's MLK Day of Engagement, both externally, off campus, as well as internally within these action groups, and helping first years continue to develop their language around these kinds of issues. Those are some of the programs that we've got brewing this upcoming January, but then also, throughout the year too, and throughout the summer, we are trying to encourage as many students to take on community engaged internships over the summer, and a lot of students start applying for summer internships actually as early as the fall semester, right around this time, so that they can be at the top of the list for some of the most competitive internships. Especially ones that are funded by the government, because you have to go through this whole background check system, and all that good stuff. But my office directly oversees these summer stipends called Community Action Awards. And so we work with the Career Development Office and a couple of different offices around campus to make sure that any kind of economic barrier is not a reason for a student to do an unpaid or underpaid internship, and so that's one of the initiatives that we're kind of revamping this year, as far as how we can best not only fund these opportunities, but help students find these opportunities, too.

5:27 Josh: Great, and what do some of these opportunities look like? What are some of the things that students might be doing through these internships?

5:34 Sarah: Yeah, so some of these opportunities can look like connecting with a local community partner, like helping run programming at a local library, just north of Bard's campus in Tivoli. It could also look like going down to our nation's capital and working with the Planned Parenthood of the greater DC area, such as one of our students did last year. But then they can also look like some opportunities internationally, as well. So, some of our students use our connections with our Bard College Berlin campus, to get internships there working with refugee populations in Berlin, as well as all sorts of international initiatives, that we really, really do try to teach our students that summer is just full of opportunities, and the sky is endless. And again, what I said before, we don't want our students to think of an economic barrier to keep them from having one of those internship experiences.

6:39 Mackie: And if I were a freshman, new on campus, and I heard about some of these initiatives and projects, how do I go about getting involved?

(continued)

6:49 Sarah: So sometimes, getting involved can look like going on our website, going on our social media, but then also more often, we have a lot of first years who just walk in the door, and either talk to a staff member – my office is actually right next to the front door so oftentimes I’m fielding general inquiries from new students – but then also talking to current students. Oftentimes we have students inevitably graduating, studying abroad, they’re looking for new leadership, they’re looking for new leadership to take over initiatives that they’ve created, and they want to see those initiatives last past their graduation, past their studying abroad. So, for example, one of our amazing class of 2019 students created a potluck series and wanted to engage students with the local community over a shared meal, and created this potluck series, studied abroad, came back, potluck series was still going on, still successful, and has now since graduated and passed it on to two rising sophomores who have continued the series and revamped it so not only are Bard students attending those potlucks and interacting with local communities, but also making the meals ahead of time too, as a community, which is really, really great. And then also another way to get involved is by getting a job with us. We hire so many students and I oversee almost all of our student staff. Those jobs can look like a couple of different things. We hire typical admin assistants, at the front desk, or directly assisting a professional staff member. We also hire STEM outreach fellows, so those are the STEM fellows who I’d mentioned, they plan Citizen Science lesson plans but also science outreach throughout the school year. We have our Election@Bard staff that helps get students not only out to vote but also educating before they cast their ballot, as well as making sure that our students are holding our elected officials accountable after election day. And we have a student journalism staff that we co run with the Council for Inclusive Excellence, who cover all these facets of activism and try to create this world of activism in bite-sized, written pieces so that Bard students can better understand what’s going on around them. There are a lot of different job opportunities as well, that you’re not holistically expected to just volunteer and get a lot out of it, but also you can get paid for being civically engaged.

9:41 Mackie: Can you talk a little bit about how the mission of the Center for Civic Engagement and all of these separate projects is also tied into academics here? And tied into the curriculum? We talked a little bit about Citizen Science, but are there other classes that allow for students to engage with different groups of people and to kind of exercise their interest in civic engagement?

10:04 Sarah: Well one of my coworkers actually, Cammie Jones, who’s the Associate Dean of Experiential Learning, she oversees those classes, and those classes can look like a whole lot of different ways of engagement. I went with one of the classes on their field trip last week, this is a cider making class, that engages with local farms and the way that they make cider that is specific to this region, specific to this climate, and then also how they interact with climate change and how that’s changing farming techniques, and my direct supervisor, Erin Cannan, Vice President of Student Affairs, she is co-teaching a class right now with Jonathan Becker, who is the Vice President of Academic Affairs. They’re co-teaching a class called Engaged Citizenship, which is a network class. And a network class is actually a really cool concept – so it’s taking that idea of engaged liberal arts and sciences, but expanding it to all of our different international partners as well, and sometimes national partners with the different early colleges teaching similar classes as well. And so, sometimes in the Engaged Citizenship class they’ll video chat into each other’s classrooms and work on research projects together, host discussions, they’ll have the same keynote speakers. Last week, the mayor of New Orleans, LaToya Cantrell, spoke as the keynote speaker to all of the Engaged Citizenship classes throughout the network, and they all video chatted in. and so it can look like a lot of really incredible things, and it’s constantly changing. For example, a new class this semester is called The Math of Puzzles and Games, and so students are learning not only the mathematical concepts behind, for example, how to solve a Rubik’s cube, but then they’re also going into the local community and sharing that with the local community as well. They had a whole set-up at the Discovery Festival in Rhinebeck, which is a local town about 20 minutes outside of campus, and they had a whole set-up at this Discovery Fest where they had four or five stations where local kids could come in and make mosaics after Rubik’s cubes, after they learn the mathematics of it, then they could design these mosaics. It was really, really great, and also great to see the Bard students take what they learned in the classroom and share outside of the classroom.

(continued)

12:50 Josh: Sarah, what do you think the future holds for the Center for Civic Engagement? Are there any new initiatives, or what are the plans for the future?

13:03 Sarah: So, the future for the Center for Civic Engagement is always inevitably changing. We're a very student-led office, where we are open to the ideas of our students. We are constantly changing our initiatives and what we have to offer based on what our students want to see out of our institution. And so, the future kind of rests with our incoming class, as far as what their interests and hopes and dreams of their collegiate experience entails. For example, when we held our open house for the class of 2023 this past August, a lot of the students were asking about what we were doing in regards to this question of citizenship. What we're doing about the border, and about the First Nation rights, the rights of Native Americans, what are we doing for land acknowledgments. And more and more Bard, and the Center for Civic Engagement specifically, but Bard in general, the culture is changing in regards to our students continuing to hold us accountable on all of these different issues. And we support our students' ideas, and whatnot, and so it really just depends on what our incoming classes would like to see out of us. So for example, tomorrow, at the Supreme Court, they're hearing the case about DACA students, and our students here, some which are first years, but also students in general, felt particularly inclined to go to the Supreme Court and be there, present, and be there to be a part of that day and that decision making. So, we're sponsoring a group of six students to go down to the Supreme Court to be a part of that process. And that only came out only because our students asked us to sponsor, and we felt like it was our civic duty to support our students in that. So, it can look like a whole lot of different things, and we're just excited for our incoming students to constantly challenge us and bring new ideas!

15:20 Mackie: Well on that note, unless you have any other questions for Sarah, Josh?

15:24 Josh: No, I don't think so! I think that is really exciting and great. Students can really kind of shape the direction. I think there's a lot in store for current Bard students and Bard students to come. So, great, well thank you!

15:36 Mackie: Thanks Sarah! That was great.

15:38 Sarah: Thanks for having me!

15:39 Mackie: And as always you can reach out to us if you have questions about this podcast, or about Bard College in general, about the admission process, whatever might come to mind at admission@bard.edu and you can also give us a call, our number is right there on our website!

15:54 Josh: Great!

15:54 Mackie: Thanks everyone!

15:55 Josh: Looking forward to next time!