

Bard Civic Engagement Podcast

[00:00:00] Hello, everyone, and welcome to another podcast from Bard College. Thank you for listening. My name is Mackie Siebens. I'm the Director of Admission at Bard College and a Bard alumni from the class of 2012. Today we're going to be talking about the Center for Civic Engagement at Bard, as well as Bard's vast global network. I'm joined by a fabulous group of guests who have expertise in all of these things and are going to be speaking to their experiences working at Bard in these different capacities in civic engagement and in the network. I'm going to start by introducing everyone. I'll hand it over first to Zarlisht to introduce yourself.

Hello, everyone. Thank you so much, Mackie, for having me. My name is Zarlisht. I work as a Program Coordinator for the Global Engagement Fellows Program based at AUCA, that's for the Open Society University Network and Bard Center for Civic Engagement.

[00:01:00] Great. Thank you. Thanks for joining us. Mikelison, do you want to go next?

Good morning. My name is Mikelison Womack. I'm a student here at Bard College. I'm a junior. I use he, him pronouns. I'm studying environmental and urban studies with a concentration in policy. Also on-campus on the part of the TLS program or the Trustees Leader Scholars program, as a project leader of the Earth Tomorrow Foundation, in that case, dedicated to our students becoming more environmentally conscious. I'm also part of the Center of Civic Engagement Certificate Program, where I just engage in learning more about civic engagement, and I'm just happy to be here. Thank you for having me.

Sure. Thanks for joining us. Caitlin and then Sarah.

Sure. Hi, everyone. My name is Caitlin O'Donnell. I use she, her pronouns. I'm based at Bard College in Annandale and I work for both the Center for Civic Engagement and the Open Society University Network and mostly on there on our civic engagement initiative [00:02:00] across those and network.

Hi, folks. I am Sarah DeVeer. I also use she, her pronouns. I am also based at Bard College, Annandale. I work for the Center for Civic Engagement. I directly oversee a lot of our Annandale-based initiatives that revolve around student teams, like our voter outreach team and our education outreach team. That's just a little preview of the work I'll be talking about a little later in the podcasts.

Thanks, Sarah. Thanks, Caitlin. I'm going to start us off by giving everyone a little bit of an overview of what Bard is, the Bard network. Bard operates a little bit differently from other small liberal arts colleges. A lot of folks out there listening might know us as the small thousand-acred campus. Although the campus [00:03:00] itself is large or 1,800, roughly undergraduate student body here at Annandale on Hudson, New York. A lot of people know that campus here in New York State, but we actually work with many partners and have campuses and programs all over the world. We have a number of projects right here in the United States as well. I want to touch upon as many as we can today. There's a lot to pack in. You can always visit our website to learn more. But we aren't going to be talking about as many of these different moving parts and constantly growing and innovating pieces of the Bard network. I'll say just to ground us in two main missions of Bard College is really to root students and undergraduate and graduate programs and certificate programs in engaging in the liberal arts and sciences as part of a much larger global

conversation, connecting with students and faculty and staff all over the world to engage in this rigorous higher education [00:04:00] program with many different voices in one classroom working together on a variety of different projects. The other goal outside of this rigorous academic program is civic engagement. There's a huge emphasis on making sure students are not only getting the practical skills that come with traveling to or connecting with virtually different communities all over the world, but there's also a real interest in making sure students are doing active listening, diving into communities, and thinking very critically and carefully about how they can use their academic program to best serve students, families, individuals all over the world. I would say that those two things, for the purposes of this podcast are going to ground us today and what we talk about, first this large global network, and also how deep rooted civic engagement is as part of the Bard College Admission. We're actually really lucky today because Zarlshat is joining [00:05:00] us from AUCA, the American University of Central Asia, and is going to be talking a little bit about the Global Fellows Program at AUCA and across the network. We're really lucky to have a representative who is going to be speaking a little bit about the Bard network from another location. If you want to go ahead Zarlshat and talk a little bit about your role and talk about how Bard is connected in this much larger global network.

Thank you so much. I think ever since I started studying at AUCA, I didn't only hear about things that were going on at AUCA, but also were some of the opportunities that Bard was offering. As you mentioned, I am based at the American University of Central Asia, but the program I'm coordinating is called Global Engagement Fellows Program. This program came to existence [00:06:00] at the end of one of the civic engagement conferences that was in Berlin, where we were just brainstorming on how to stay connected when the get-engaged conferences comes to an end. We came up with the idea of Global Engagement Fellows. Basically what we do through this program is we promote and coordinate thematic civic engagement projects across the Open Society University Network. We select a new group of fellows every year, so we have new global fellows on annual basis. Then the selected global fellows, they are people who have developed and sustain civic engagement projects and young leaders who have demonstrated leadership skills and then desire for working with others in their communities and then their institutions. The role of a global fellow [00:07:00] is basically to carry the activities we have within the program, like our monthly civic engagement workshops, office hours, and they all have their own civic engagement projects that they run and lead across the network. I think that's quite it. That's the general overview of what we do with the Global Fellows Program within the Bard and also network.

Great. Thank you. That's very helpful, I think. I'll back up a little bit too and just give a little bit of history of OSUN as well. The Open Society University Network known as OSUN. This is a partnership between Bard and originally Central European University that started in 2020 and has a significant endowment to build out more programs that the college [00:08:00] has been building upon for a long time, civic engagement programs, access work to rigorous higher-level education, and liberal arts and sciences programs specifically. Of course, the AUCA, American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan is where Zarlshat is joining us from today, and that's one of many campuses and programs that Bard College is connected to through these partnerships. But that overview is really helpful, so thank you. Moving on, I guess to talk a little bit more about civic engagement, Sarah, do you want to talk a little bit about the origins of the Center for Civic Engagement and its mission specifically?

Sure, yeah. The Center for Civic Engagement, as some of the founders, Aaron Cannon and Jonathan Becker often talk about who are still at Bard since its founding. They came to this realization [00:09:00] in 2011 that even though civic engagement was a central part of Bard's mission in the world, we needed a formalize it a little bit more. Around that time, they created a Center for Civic Engagement website and it was supposed to be just that. It was supposed to just be a website of resources on how college students who are very energetic, have a lot of really great ideas and want to

put that to action, how they could do exactly that and deploy themselves throughout the community locally and through these issues that they're most passionate about. What started as a website in 2011 then really blossomed out of that. I started Bard in 2013. I went to Bard from then until 2017 when I graduated. I personally can't imagine [00:10:00] Bard before the Center for Civic Engagement, even though I was still pretty new when I first came to Bard. It really did make such an impact on my time. I wasn't ever directly involved with the Center for Civic Engagement, I mostly just always really admired my peers who were and had those jobs and did those TLS projects. I was a really great volunteer in my friend's projects and a really great supporter from the sidelines. I've had such a blast becoming a staff member and supporting those students and also a more formalized way of helping them navigate where they really want to ignite their passion in civic engagement and connecting with community partners.

The Center for Civic Engagement mission is that we're a private institution working in the public good. That really is my job, is helping students realize [00:11:00] what that means for them personally. I work with a lot of community partners and oftentimes we'll have tabling time in the cafeteria, or we employ a lot of students and we really just like to talk to students and help figure out what they're most excited to get involved with civic engagement wise and how civic engagement continue to enrich their barred experience. That's where we stand today, is that the Center for Civic Engagement with our internal on-campus partnerships with the Career Development Office as well. We really want to have you plant the seeds here at Bard to then grow into whatever you want it to be for the rest of your life, really after Bard and continue to make impactful experience if you decide to stay in the Hudson Valley like I did, or if you decide to bring that action somewhere else, [00:12:00] just know that we're here to help you realize that and help water that seed so to say.

Can I just follow up on one of Sarah's points just to really make it clear. This is something that might not be as obvious. Especially if you are not yet in a college setting. I think what's so interesting about the Center for Civic Engagement and the work we do is that there are built-in programs that you can get involved in as a student to plug into, such as our long-established voting initiative and our STEM outreach programs where we're going into local schools and we're teaching students about science, math, technology, and doing experiments with them, getting them excited about learning. This is probably Mikelison, what you're going to touch on. Students have where with all and the encouragement from the college and from the Center for Civic Engagement staff and people like czar to start their own projects at Bard and really experiment [00:13:00] with being a leader to respond to issues that they want to be addressing in their community, whatever that community may be. I think that's just a really interesting as a newer staff member to the center, I think that just such an interesting distinction. If you want to get involved, you can, and they're just multiple ways of plugging in.

Thanks, Caitlin. Mikelison I know you touched on this in your introduction as a leader running a civic engagement program. But there's a whole history of students that have gone off and started their own projects. Our Bard Prison Initiative is a longstanding program bringing associates and bachelor's degrees into facilities across New York State. These are prison facilities where students are getting their associates or their bachelor's and the Bard program Lavazz is a widely circulated magazine in Spanish. It's the largest Spanish publication in the Hudson Valley, started by a student and still run by that student, [00:14:00] same with the Bard Prison Initiative. Started as brothers at Bard, bringing young men of color access to higher education. That was started by students and is still growing today. There's a long history of so many really incredible programs that students have started. You're a part of that history. Mikelison, do you want to talk a little bit about what you are doing?

Yes, of course. I am a part of the trustees Leadership Scholar Program, which is really a program that was designed to support leadership development. I really geared towards students wanting to get hands-on community engagement

projects going in community. The students in the TLS program proposed InDesign civic engagement projects based on their passionate interests. An example of that is me, for example, I actually major in environmental urban studies and I'm an advocate for the environment. I decided to start a TLS project called the Earth Tomorrow Foundation. [00:15:00] It caters for K-12 students becoming more environmentally conscious through the use of hands-on sustainability research projects, lesson plans, food, water filtration devices, and talking about PCBs in the Hudson. A lot of projects that have come out of the trustees leader project include Brothers@ and there's also some that are doing some great work now today too such as Sister to Sister, which is one of the newer ones that have been institutionalized. To bar that focus on student learning, internships to young women of color. There's also the lag body experience that host the conference every year. Just to talk about creating safe spaces for women of color and people of color on campus. The trustee leaders scholars program is something that, is a great thing to be a part of. Also I've heard that they celebrated their 20th year of student projects this year, [00:16:00] which is amazing. So yes.

Thank you. That's it is a really longstanding tradition and I think one that will continue for many years. Sarah, do you want to talk a little bit, I guess we touched a little bit on certainly the growth of starting from a website and now becoming this huge engine. We also talked a little bit about Caitlin mentioned some of the programs too, is there anything there that you want to add, any programs that you are specifically in touch with that you just want to talk a little bit more about?

Sure, I will specifically shout out three of my student run projects. One of which is Election@Bard, which is our voter outreach project. Because of the sheer impact of our students, we have been in the process of battling for student voter rights for the past 20 years. [00:17:00] In 2020, we're able to obtain our first on-campus polling place. Which was really exciting after 20 years of trying to fight for the student right to vote. Other smaller projects within that. But still are really great work is continuously offering voter registration support, registering to vote and our country is incredibly fraught and difficult for our students. Helping our students navigate. Finding out if their registration went through, if they've been made an inactive voter for any reason, how to request an absentee ballot, how to send an absentee ballot back in. Because we oftentimes have a lot of students who come to Bard from other places who were really active in other places and want to stay active in those other places. [00:18:00] The election up our team is a nonpartisan team, which means that we don't encourage students to vote a certain way or vote in a certain place. If you are from California and you come to Bard and you want to maintain that voter registration in California, we'll still help you. If you come to Bard and want to register here, but don't know anything about what's on the ballot, we'll help you know how to find a sample ballot so you can do your own research ahead of time before walking into the voter booth. It's a lot of that support. If you have any issues with your voter registration going through. We've offered transportation to get to the Board of Elections to be able to vote, affidavit, ballot on election day, all resources. It's really incredible what our students have been able to accomplish through this Election@Bard [00:19:00] support, that's one team. Another team is our education outreach team. Primarily both do focus in STEM, but we try to open that up to be steam as well. Science technology, engineering, art, and math. During citizen science, which will most likely happen during their first year at Bard, we help with one of the strands. Education science is a choose your own adventure program where if you're really passionate about education, you can choose the education track of citizen science. That's where the CCE comes in and helps organize those school visits. You get to visit a school and be a part of their classroom for a day. Shadows, upperclassmen students who have built lesson plans that follow the New York State standards. [00:20:00] Then at the end of the program, build your own lesson plan and come back to the CCE once you've finished the system science program. We can set you up with opportunities to be able to watch your lesson plan come to life with one of our partner schools around the area. That's a really great program that you can get involved with within your first year at Bard through the education strand of citizen science. We also do loads of other stuff as well. If you want to see if that's right for you before citizen science as well, we have smaller programs

like STEM nights out where we take over a cafeteria or a gym of a community partner and do exactly what it sounds like. We set up stations of fun stomach experiments like apple volcanoes and strawberry DNA and teaching students, accessible coding for robotics and all stuff like that. It just depends on what the community wants [00:21:00] and how Bard can match up with our student abilities. The last project that I'll highlight is the scale project, which was started a few years back by an econ major who realize that a place like Bard which oftentimes doesn't talk about socioeconomic status and class when it comes to hidden fees at Bard and how can students work towards demystifying those hidden fees and support each other in sharing resources like creating a textbook library in partnership with the Stevenson Library and those librarians there. How can we share information about things like the Community Action Award, which the Center for Civic Engagement runs. It's [00:22:00] a summer internships stipend that if you're taking on an internship that is public-facing and community-based. That's unpaid. We will help get you paid through Bard because we believe that no one should miss out on an opportunity that will enrich your Bard experience because of your socioeconomic background. The scale project will help promote that and make sure that the students who actually need this the most are aware of what their resources are. Through all of that, we have some really great students. If you would like to e-mail me, we're going to include our emails at the end. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have about anything I just said.

Thanks, Sarah. Yeah. One other thing moving into this next question that I have for Mikelison is, through [00:23:00] all of these projects and programs there's a lot of work being done to build community and to strengthen different communities, and one of the things that Bard is really starting to do is to make sure the students doing that work and learning how to do that work, are able to package their skills and understand how valuable the skills that they're building through these projects are. Things like the certificate program with the Center for Civic Engagement are doing more of those things and that's really exciting. Mikelison, do you want to talk a little bit about the certificate?

Yeah, of course. The certificate is actually something a little bit newer to CCE. I'm actually a part of the inaugural class to get the certificate, which is really exciting. But the certificate really provides a structure for undergraduate students interested in deepening their knowledge in understanding of civic and community engagement, and it's something that allows students to really incorporate civic engagement into their time here at Bard. It [00:24:00] gives you a lot of co-curricular I guess, ideas where you're able to do community engagement but also go into the classroom and learn more about what it means to be civically engaged and how to create sustainable projects. I can talk about a few of the courses that they offer to the certificate program especially with the ELAS courses. ELAS courses are engaged liberal arts and sciences courses that bring theory to practice by linking coursework and critical thinking and engagement activities. Also we have to take as being a part of the Center for Civic Engagement Certificate Program, there are a lot of requirements that we have to meet that really catered towards students' understanding what it means to be civically engaged. One of the questions that I've actually personally taken, what's the Civic Engagement Course? That actually was to the OSUN program or the OSUN network. It allowed me to take [00:25:00] a course with international students and people from all over the world and talk about different projects that cater to their particular communities. Seeing people talking about ending hunger in their communities or bettering education, to even clothing drives and providing homeless people for places to stay. It was really a interesting course and really a life-changing course actually for me to take because you get to see so many different, not necessarily struggles, but you get to see different things that communities needs across the world to just better their community, and what people are doing to better their community is amazing.

Yeah, thank you. I think that gives hopefully a good understanding of just how ingrained civic engagement is and is becoming. It's very pervasive across everything that we do, both in the curriculum and through these specific civic engagement projects. I think you've probably gathered from the conversation for those listeners [00:26:00] tuning in

that there is a lot of power and responsibility handed over to students with these great ideas and that's something that the Center for Civic Engagement really encourages and the college encourages as a whole. Many of these projects as you've learned were started by students or the students came up with the idea and staff and faculty jump in and offer guidance, but students are really doing a lot of these projects starting with an idea and seeing it all the way through which is really incredible. I don't know if anyone wants to jump in and talk a little bit about this, but this is a full community priority, and so faculty staff and students work together. I think that's probably actually best demonstrated through the ELAS courses where civic engagement is being tied into the courses faculty or teaching and there's some real interaction engagement there across students and faculty. I think we'll move on and actually start to come to a close [00:27:00] for this particular episode of our podcast series. But I think maybe we could start to end by letting students know how they can get involved and what advice the guests on this podcast might have for students that are interested in jumping in. I'll open that up to see if anyone wants to start us off there.

One of the first ways that you can get involved is coming to our Language and Thinking events that the Center for Civic Engagement holds. I run those and I always take note of the first years who show interests and keeps showing up. That's one of the ways to get involved at Bard is to keep showing up. Bard is a relatively small community as mentioned before, and the first years who make the quickest impact are the first years who show up. That's one of my [00:28:00] points of advice and also to show up during L&T, Language and Thinking, and also Citizen Science as I mentioned earlier. The Center for Civic Engagement is really involved with the education strand, which is one of the strands of Citizen Science but then also during MLK Day of Engagement, the Center for Civic Engagement runs most of the activities that happens during that weekend, and we also take note of those new students who are particularly really active during that weekend. Those are two really great ways that I hope to see you, and getting involved when you come to Bard.

I also wanted to say that a lot of the opportunities both from Bard Center for Civic Engagement and also [00:29:00] some of the other programs that are open to students from a Bard International Network and the Open Society University Network, the OSUN Instagram page. Open Society University Network or OSUN if you search it on Instagram, it will pop up and they are very active there. If there's a workshop happening or a panel happening, they post stories about that and they also post it on their Instagram page. Apart from that, I think reaching out to Center for Civic Engagement is always a great idea. They have helped so many students develop their projects, sustain their projects, and in addition to that, I will come back quickly to the OSUN Instagram page. When you follow this Instagram page and if you see a workshop you can always reach out by replying to the story and just asking what is that if you're eligible or not, and etc. Earlier I mentioned the Global Fellows program. Currently we have global fellows [00:30:00] from about eight institutions from within Bard International Network and the OSUN network, but next semester we're going to have hopefully one global fellow per institution and all of them will be running office hours and announcing their office hours so students can go to them not only for questions but also to talk and discuss their civic engagement ideas or their projects.

A piece of advice I actually have for I guess undergraduate students and students coming into Bard, is to just show up to the TLS Office on the Second Floor of the Campus Center. That's just my small piece of advice is to just show up and if you do have a project they are willing to hear you out, they are willing to help you build it, and they're just a great support system.

Great. Thanks, everyone. Great advice, and before we close, I am just going to run through some emails and Instagram pages and accounts that you can follow so that you can [00:31:00] start to branch out and do a little bit of research and learn more about what Bard and its network does. Of course, you can always reach out to

civic@bard.edu for information on Civic Engagement. Zarlisht mentioned the OSUN Instagram page, CCE also has an Instagram @bardcce, cce.bard.edu is a great webpage to go to, and then the opensocietyuniversitynetwork.org is another place for you to learn more about OSUN and the network. I want to thank all of our guests today. It's been a pleasure to host you. I want to give a special shout out to everyone who you're all representing, all the work that's being done at Bard and the students bring their ideas forward and taking that step in building some really wonderful program. Thank you for listening. As always, you can reach out to admission@bard.edu if you have questions, and we can help [00:32:00] find the answers and connect you with faculty staff and students who know more. Thank you all very much again for listening and you'll hear us on the next broadcast. Thanks.