

# CIVIC ★ LEARNING for an ENGAGED ★ DEMOCRACY

Know. Experience. Act.

## The Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Coalition (CLDE)

[www.collegeciviclearning.org](http://www.collegeciviclearning.org)

### Our Vision



**Imagine if every college student devoted time and talent to democracy's future!**

### Our Shared Commitment

Civic Inquiry and Democracy Engagement should become part of **each** two- and four-year college student's educational pathway.

**Every Student, Every Degree:** The CLDE Coalition is working to engage all college students with democracy's principles, histories, and future, and to prepare all college students to help tackle democracy's urgent problems. We place special emphasis on students from communities that historically have been underserved in higher education, and on engaging students with civic inquiry studies related both to their career preparation and to democracy's future, in the U.S. and across the world.

### Democracy and the CLDE Coalition

The Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Coalition (CLDE Coalition) was created in 2021 by higher education and policy organizations in response to the serious challenges facing democracy at home and abroad. Those challenges have not abated and the CLDE Coalition's work to involve all college students in civic inquiry and democracy engagement has become even more urgent.

There already is a vibrant civic learning movement in U.S. higher education. But civic learning typically remains elective rather than inclusive. Working with civic-minded faculty, staff, and institutional leaders, the Coalition seeks to accelerate the spread of college civic learning, provide evidence on "what works," and build policy leadership for the movement.

The coalition is led by the **American Association of Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, College Promise, Complete College America, and State Higher Education Executive Officers.**

### CLDE Coalition Contributing Partners

With support from the Endeavor Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and the Teagle Foundation, the Coalition is working with over 75 organizational partners, including all seven institutional accrediting commissions; a growing number of state systems; national and regional educational associations; bridge-building, free expression, and civil dialogue organizations; student success organizations; assessment organizations; and K-12 civic and history learning reforms.

## The CLDE Coalition's Current Work

### Current Priorities

- ★ Championing **Every Student, Every Degree: College Civic Learning for Today's Students and Tomorrow's Democracy**. This 2024 CLDE Coalition report clarifies the multiple goals for civic and democracy learning in college (see CLDE Learning Framework, below) and shows how institutions can connect CLDE studies to students' diverse concerns, life experiences, and intended careers.
- ★ Mobilizing educator and policy commitment to College Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (CLDE) through **national and state-based planning and action** forums on the why, what and how of making college CLDE a shared priority for a democracy in need of repair and an integral part of high-impact college learning.
- ★ Publicizing **research about what students gain** from active civic learning, including: increased completion, employer-prized skills, belonging/inclusive community, and civic agency and motivation.
- ★ Weaving civic learning into the key pillars of **student success initiatives** and showing how civic problem-solving connects with **career readiness**.
- ★ Building **collaborative scaling initiatives** to help make civic inquiry and problem solving the norm for quality degrees in U.S. higher education.

### The CLDE Learning Framework

The CLDE Framework for Students' Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement centers on each student's development of **Purposeful Civic Engagement**, through studies that include:

- Democratic Knowledge and Levers for Change;
- Guided Practice in Bridge-Building and Problem Solving;
- Practical Experience and Projects; and
- Career-Related Civic and Ethical Learning.

### Full Participation Institutional Profiles

The CLDE Coalition publicizes Full Participation Institutions (FPIs) where college civic learning already is required to earn a two- or four-year degree. FPIs show how civic learning can be tailored to diverse campus missions and student needs.

**FPI profiles include civic learning in:**

- Foundational and Advanced General Education;
- Experiential Learning Requirements;
- Programming for Civil Dialogues & Collaborations Across Difference.

### Collaborative Scaling Initiatives

Civic-minded organizations, including AAC&U, Campus Compact, the Bonner Foundation, Bringing Theory to Practice, and many others have already helped campus-level educators build a creative civic learning movement across U.S. higher education. But with workforce development the predominant public policy priority, this movement has remained largely invisible to those not involved.

The CLDE Coalition is working to reverse this inattention by bringing policy influencers together with leaders and faculty from "full participation" civic learning institutions to explore feasible ways to make college civic learning and democracy engagement a valued part of *all* students' degree pathways. The coalition's strategy involves networks of networks collaborating together to make civic learning and democratic engagement the norm across higher education.

#### The Accreditation Initiative

The CLDE Coalition has formed a partnership with each of the Institutional Accrediting Commissions to foreground civic learning in the context of self-study for accreditation renewals. HLC and ACCJC now require civic engagement as an accreditation standard, and SACSCOC issued a board-approved policy brief calling civic literacy and engagement "essential."

#### The Multi-State Collaborative (MSC)

SHEEO, a CLDE lead partner, and NASH are building a Multi-State Collaborative to advance college civic learning and democratic engagement. The MSC is composed of states in which higher education system leaders affirm that college civic learning is important for all students. The MSC will include **community colleges** in each participating state and will also work with civic-active private institutions.

#### The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU)

The ACCU sent a letter in 2023 to all its members announcing that it has agreed to work with the CLDE Coalition. ACCU asked its members to describe programs at their institutions that promote civic learning and democracy engagement. The material has been received, and is being analyzed to plan the ACCU initiative.

# The Multi-State Collaborative ★

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## ★ for College Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement

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The Multi-state Collaborative for College Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (the “MSC”) promotes robust state-level policies and programs to accelerate civic learning for an engaged democracy among all types of higher education systems in all fifty states, as well as U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.

The MSC is organized through a partnership between State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO), a CLDE Coalition lead partner, and the National Association of System Heads (NASH), and in collaboration with the Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (CLDE) Coalition.\*

### Leadership

The co-chairs of the MSC are:

Richard M. Freeland, Former Commissioner of Higher Education for Massachusetts, President Emeritus of Northeastern University (representing SHEEO)

Nancy S. Shapiro, Senior Advisor for Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (CLDE), Research Scholar, University of Maryland College of Education (representing NASH)

### Membership

The MSC is composed of states in which higher education system leaders affirm that:

public higher education has a civic mission, and part of that civic mission is preparing students for active, effective, informed participation in civic and democratic life;

that some intentional form of civic education should be part of the learning experience of all degree and certificate seeking students in their system - even if that is not the case now and may take some time to achieve;

joining a learning community with other states that share these values and goals means helping each other develop ways of pursuing them while honoring what is appropriate and feasible within the context of each state.

### Important Topics for Exploration

The MSC is committed to the principle that participating higher education systems must proceed in their own way toward a fully developed set of programs and policies in the area of civic learning and democracy engagement. For the MSC as a learning community, the following areas of exploration represent some important topics for the participating state systems.

**Civic Learning in General Education:** attention to civic learning in the academic curriculum within general education requirements and/or within majors with the goal of including every student.

**Civic Skills and Dispositions:** attention to cultivating the inclination and capacity to work in the civic arena.

**Mutual Respect:** attention to working toward bridging areas of potential disagreement and difference; our goal is to foster a nonpartisan commitment to civic learning and democracy engagement.

**Free Expression and Civil Discourse in Academic Settings:** attention to the issue of assuring free expression of ideas and civil dialogue across lines of difference and disagreement; these values are an essential component of democracy.

**Indicators of Progress and Success:** attention to identifying measurable learning outcomes related to civic learning goals and instituting assessment systems that will document success in achieving these outcomes.

**Alignment with K-12 Policies and Programs:** attention to and coordinated efforts of K-12 civic learning.

**Campus-level Capacity:** attention to faculty, staff, and academic leaders' preparation to support students' civic learning in the curriculum, co-curriculum, and community.

\*The CLDE Coalition leverages the power of seventy-five lead and partner organizations to promote civic learning for an engaged democracy. The lead organizations are: American Association of Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, Complete College America, College Promise, and State Higher Education Officers Association (SHEEO). To learn more: [www.collegeciviclearning.org](http://www.collegeciviclearning.org)

# What Should Students Gain from Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement in College?

## THE CLDE FRAMEWORK FOR COLLEGE CIVIC LEARNING AND DEMOCRACY ENGAGEMENT

Across the United States, a growing number of educators, policy leaders, and citizens are asking how we can better prepare today's students for their roles and responsibilities in renewing U.S. democracy and securing democracy's success across the globe.

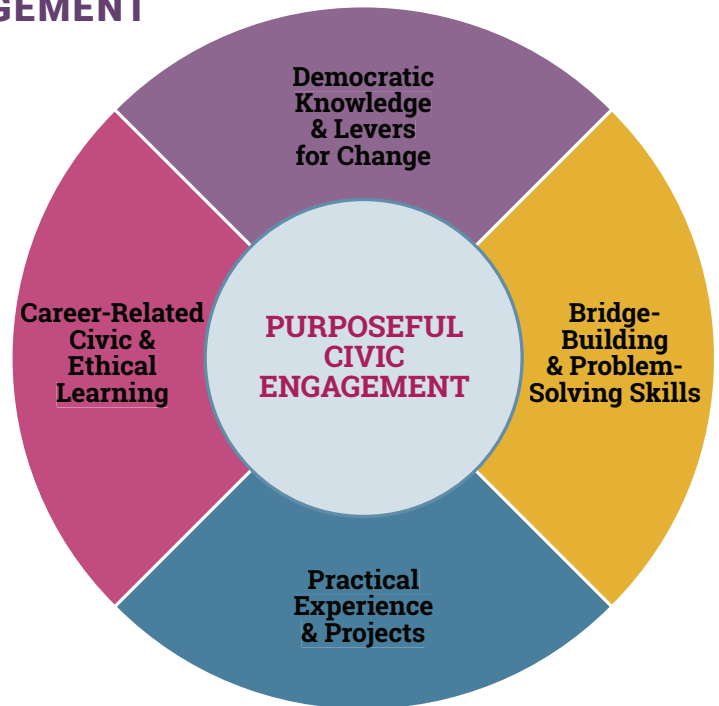
Strengthening P-12 education in history and civics is part of the answer. But with a majority of Americans now enrolling in postsecondary education – either directly from high school or as working adults – the college curriculum is an equally important context for building purposeful civic engagement and the capacities that a successful democracy needs.

Students develop purposeful civic engagement by reflecting on their own civic identities and experiences, exploring democracy's development and aspirations, practicing productive dialogue with those who disagree, and examining – both in general and career-related studies and in community-based practical experience – how choices affect individuals and communities.

For 21st-century America, civic learning and democracy engagement also should include explorations of diversity in all its forms. The United States is the world's most diverse democracy, and today, one of our biggest challenges is creating better ways to solve problems together, across many kinds of difference.

***"Freedom is never really won. You earn it and win it in every generation."***

**Coretta Scott King**

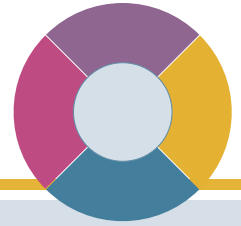


The core question college educators need to resolve is whether they will include all college students, or just some college students, in civic learning. The CLDE Coalition is calling on postsecondary education to make college civic learning and democracy engagement both expected and inclusive.

The coalition's **CLDE Framework** provides a point of departure for discussion, debate, and decisions at all levels – national, state, and institutional – about ways to revitalize education for democracy for all postsecondary learners and the democracy we share.

See details overleaf →

## The CLDE Framework for College Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Includes:



### DEMOCRATIC KNOWLEDGE & LEVERS FOR CHANGE

**Students explore:**

- ★ Key democratic principles and debates about meaning and application
- ★ Constitutionalism and the political systems that frame democratic governance
- ★ Founding and freedom texts for the U.S. democratic republic
- ★ Historical and comparative knowledge of U.S. and global freedom movements
- ★ Authoritarianism and other anti-democracy movements
- ★ Civic inquiry and public good questions related to students' careers
- ★ Levers for influencing change in civil society and specific career fields
- ★ Guided reflection on students' experiences and views of democracy

**Where?** In general education programs and courses that explore democracy's development, principles, contestations, and challenges, including movements for policy and societal change, and in students' majors, including career and technical fields

### BRIDGE-BUILDING & PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

**Students develop:**

- ★ Communication skills: written, oral, and intergroup dialogue
- ★ Critical inquiry and evidence-based reasoning
- ★ Digital, data, and media literacy, including disinformation
- ★ Productive engagement with diverse views and experiences
- ★ Problem solving with diverse partners
- ★ Ethical reasoning about alternative approaches to problems
- ★ Purpose and agency grounded in a strong sense of identity

**Where?** Practiced across general education and all majors, including career and technical studies, and in co-curricular and community-based experiences and projects

### PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE & PROJECTS

**Students help create new solutions through:**

- ★ Individual and group work on public good and justice questions
- ★ Collaborative service learning projects in courses
- ★ Community-based problem solving with diverse partners
- ★ Research projects with and for community or government organizations
- ★ Public presentation and discussion of project results
- ★ Guided reflection on their learning from field-based experience and problem solving

**Where?** Research and/or action projects completed to meet degree requirements in majors, certificates, and/or general education

### CAREER-RELATED CIVIC & ETHICAL LEARNING

**Students work on:**

- ★ Public policy and public good issues related to chosen or likely careers
- ★ Levers for influencing policy decisions in their career fields
- ★ Civility, fairness, and collaborative problem solving in work contexts
- ★ Career-related ethical principles and standards for practice
- ★ Civic, ethical, and fairness questions raised through practical problem solving
- ★ Collaborative reflection – with mentors and peers – on civic, ethical, and fairness issues related to careers

**Where?** In students' major fields, including career and technical studies; in career planning programs, curricular or co-curricular; and in practicums and projects required for a degree or certificate

### STUDENTS' PURPOSEFUL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND CHOICES FOR THE FUTURE

Through their course-taking, practical experiences working on public good questions, and guided reflection on their own identities, goals, and civic voice, students will make their own decisions about how they want to contribute to the public good beyond college. Some students may work on public good questions related to their professions and/or workplace. Others may become active in local and/or faith communities. Some will choose public service as their career. Many will contribute primarily as engaged and knowledgeable voters.

Whatever their choices for the future, all students should graduate civic ready, democracy ready, and career ready. And they should be deeply conversant with public good questions directly related to their intended careers.

The Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (CLDE) Coalition brings together education and policy organizations committed to making CLDE a priority across higher education and in public policy. The coalition is led by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, College Promise, Complete College America, and State Higher Education Executive Officers. The coalition is working in partnership with more than 70 higher education and student success organizations, including many state systems, and all seven institutional accreditors.



## How College Students Benefit from Civic Learning and Engagement

<b>Outcomes for Students</b>	<b>Summary of Findings from 2022 AAC&amp;U Synthesis of Research on Community-Based and Civic Engagement</b>
<b>Graduation and retention (11 studies)<sup>1</sup> and other institutional outcomes (2)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More likely to graduate</li> <li>▪ Earned more credits</li> <li>▪ More likely to re-enroll</li> <li>▪ Institutional implementation of collaborative and participatory pedagogies</li> <li>▪ Students practicing collaborative and mutual learning</li> </ul>
<b>Mindsets and dispositions (17)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased openness to and understanding of diversity</li> <li>▪ Increased awareness of social issues and social justice</li> <li>▪ Increased adaptability</li> <li>▪ Positive self-perceptions of socially responsible leadership</li> <li>▪ More positive attitude toward school and enjoyment of challenging tasks</li> <li>▪ Increased self-efficacy and sense of belonging</li> </ul>
<b>Personal and social responsibility (28)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased civic attitudes and civic mindedness</li> <li>▪ Increased civic and community-based engagement (desire/goals, behaviors during and after college, perceived value)</li> <li>▪ Civic learning</li> <li>▪ Perceived civic and social responsibility</li> <li>▪ Moral and ethical reasoning and actions</li> </ul>
<b>Intellectual and practical skills (9)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved interpersonal skills: communication, collaboration, and teamwork</li> <li>▪ Increased problem-solving and critical thinking skills</li> <li>▪ Increased academic content learning and skills such as research, writing, and mathematical analysis</li> </ul>
<b>Career preparation (4)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Better career exploration skills</li> <li>▪ Increased career exploration in a field related to public service</li> <li>▪ Increased career-related knowledge and skills</li> </ul>
<b>Learning gains (10)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved grades and GPA</li> <li>▪ Improved test performance and assignment scores</li> <li>▪ Self-reported general learning gains</li> </ul>
<b>Findings for underserved students<sup>2</sup>(11)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Findings are most consistently discussed in terms of race effects across student populations.</li> <li>▪ Studies tend to focus on a small set of outcomes, such as cumulative GPA, retention rates, credits earned, and graduation rates.</li> </ul>

Source: [Chittum, J. R., Enke, K. A. E., & Finley, A. P. \(2022\). \*The effects of community-based and civic engagement in higher education\*. American Association of Colleges and Universities.](#) The research synthesis was funded by a grant from Lumina Foundation. This chart is adapted from Table 4.

<sup>1</sup>Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of publications with findings related to each outcome category. The total number of publications exceeds the sample size because many studies included multiple outcomes of focus.

<sup>2</sup>Where applicable, studies examining effects for underserved students are also included in each of the other outcome categories.

# Every Student, Every Year

## Sample Guided Pathway with Civic and Problem-Centered Learning

Through **civic learning for an engaged democracy**, students focus deeply on civic inquiry, ethical inquiry, diversity, and democracy across the curriculum. Colleges connect all of these areas to problem-solving and weave them into general education and majors.

Students develop democratic knowledge, ethical responsibility, equity engagement, and high-value problem-solving skills

that are essential for participating in a democratic society and adapting to a changing workplace.

This sample curriculum includes complex civic and democracy questions; inquiry and problem-solving related to the major; a required community-based practicum; and guided reflection about students' development of purpose, agency, and voice from their first to final year.

### High-Value Skills Needed in Both Careers and Democracy

- Critical inquiry and evidence-based reasoning
- Digital, data, and media literacy
- Productive engagement with diverse views and experiences
- Ethical reasoning and actions
- Problem-solving with diverse partners
- Purpose and agency grounded in a strong sense of identity

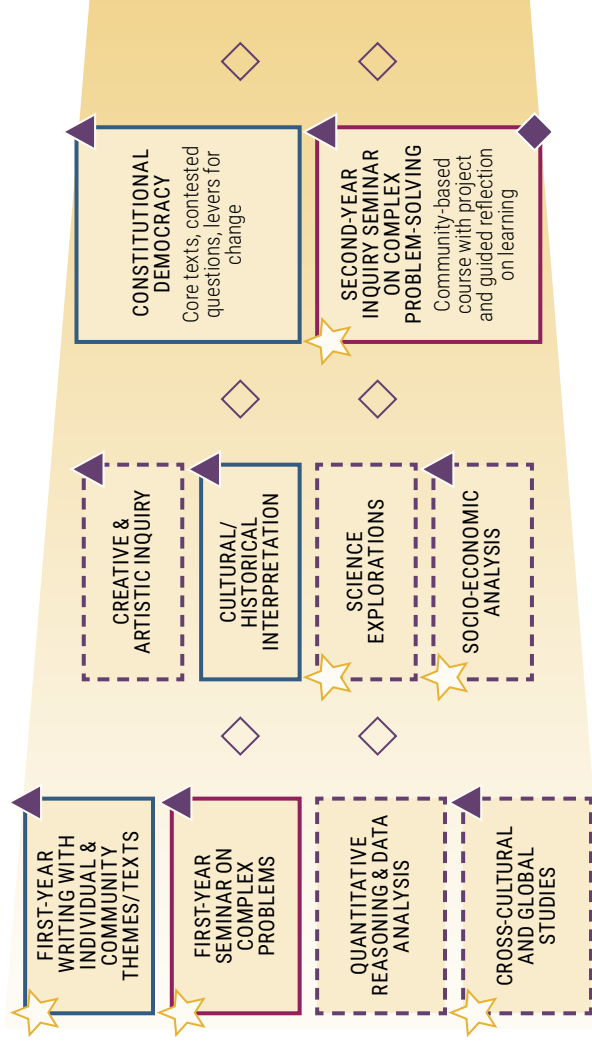
## CIVIC ★ LEARNING for an ENGAGED ★ DEMOCRACY

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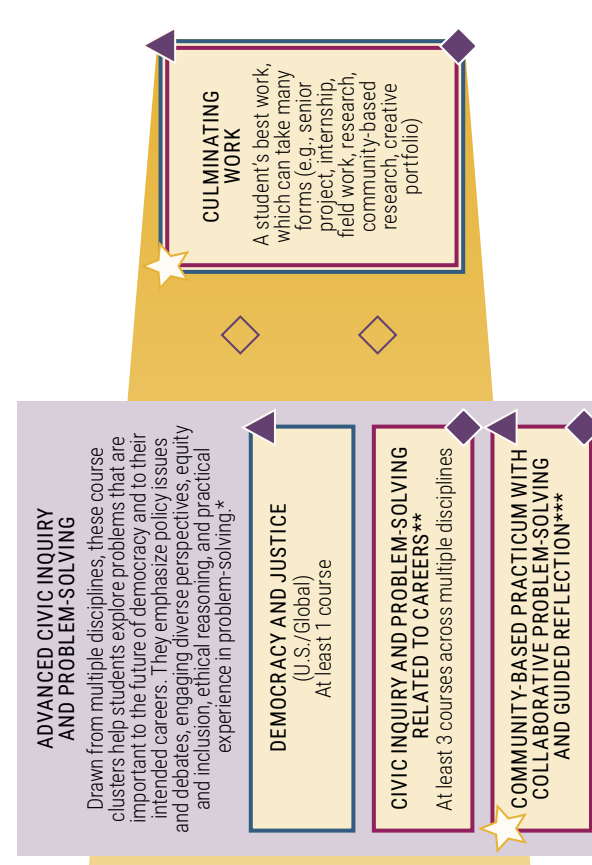
### KEY

- Civic and/or democracy emphasis
- Problem-solving emphasis
- May explore questions related to public good
- Engaging diverse views & perspectives
- Courses related to student's major
- High-impact practices (HIPs)
- Additional courses in student's major

## Core Learning for an Interconnected World



## Problem-Centered Course Clusters



## E-PORTFOLIO SHOWS STUDENT'S WORK ON CIVIC AND SOCIETAL PROBLEMS OVER TIME AND DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH-VALUE SKILLS

\* Research methods and/or evaluation of evidence are presumed to be part of the major.

\*\* Sample problems for course clusters: health policies and politics; social mobility; health and well-being; fueling the world; quests for justice and social power; traditions, cultures, and change; education and democracy; and markets and values.

\*\*\* This practical problem-solving experience may be part of the Problem-Centered Course Clusters or a standard part of the major. Where practicum are already required, faculty may choose to strengthen their civic, ethical, and equity components.

FIGURE 12

## Every Student, Every Degree, Every Certificate Sample Community College Guided Pathway Using the CLDE Framework

Community college students frequently choose programs that are closely related to careers, including associate degree programs and shorter certificate programs that meet workforce needs. This pathway provides flexible guidelines for threading civic and democracy learning into both two-year associate degrees (typically 60 credit hours) and certificate programs (typically 24–30 credit hours).

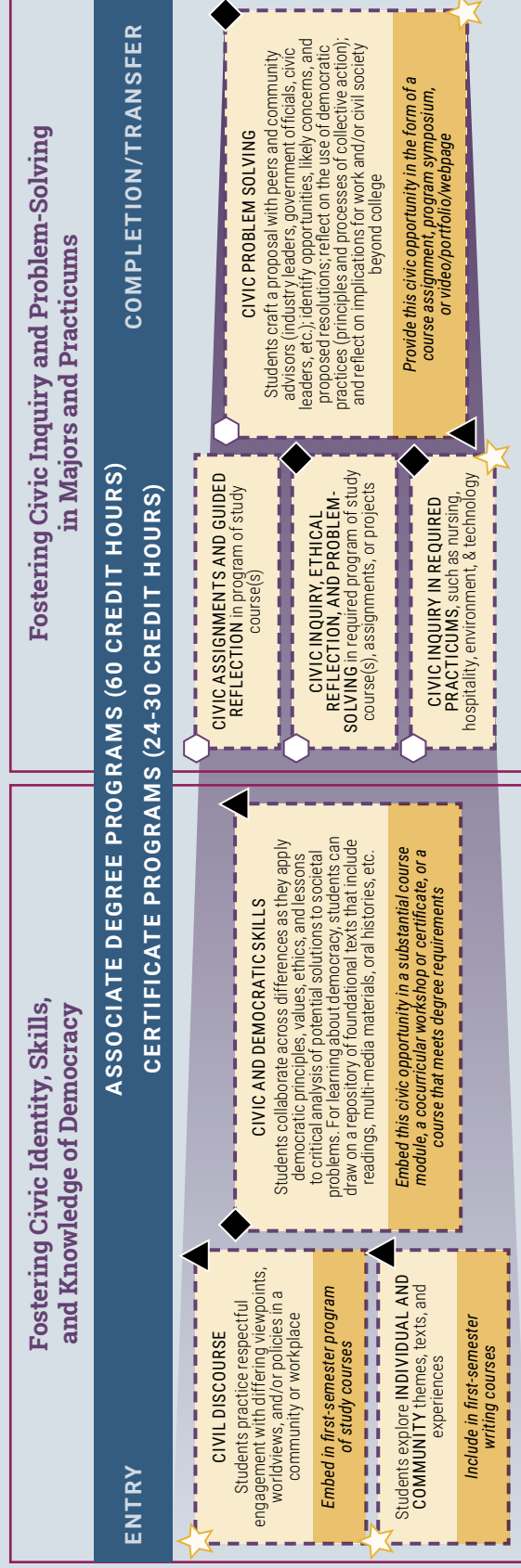
Across this sample curriculum, faculty ask students to complete assignments, projects, and practicums in which they (a) wrestle with significant societal problems; (b) collect and organize different viewpoints about problems and proposed solutions; (c) work with others across differences to apply democratic values in critical analysis and problem-solving; and (d) reflect on ways their civic and democratic learning can be used in their careers and society.

### High-Value Skills Needed in Both Careers and Democracy

- Communications skills
- Critical inquiry and evidence-based reasoning
- Digital, data, and media literacy
- Ethical reasoning and actions
- Problem solving with diverse partners
- Productive engagement with diverse views and experiences
- Purpose and agency grounded in a strong sense of identity

### KEY

- ▭ Exploring questions related to public good
- ▲ Engaging diverse views & perspectives
- ◆ Civic problem solving in program of study
- ◻ Guided reflection
- ★ High-impact practices (HIPs)



### Pathway Design Notes

1. This pathway includes multiple HIPs, beginning in the first semester, to increase the likelihood of completion while also fostering civic identity and skills.
2. For certificate programs, civic and democracy assignments and guided reflection should be included in selected program-of-study courses.
3. For both associate degrees and certificates, faculty should thread civic inquiry and guided reflection into practicums or other field-based learning requirements.