Georgia State University  
Division of Student Affairs  
Civic Engagement

Mission Statement
The Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) promotes and encourages opportunities for community service and service-learning that will enhance student learning and advance community development while responding to societal issues and concerns. The OCE provides assistance to students, student groups, faculty, and staff with regards to volunteerism, community service, service learning and also serves as a clearinghouse/think-tank for outreach programs in the metropolitan Atlanta area.

Executive Summary
The Office of Civic Engagement continues to build upon community outreach efforts to better serve students, faculty, non-profits and the Atlanta community. Research suggests that well-designed community service and service-learning programs provide numerous benefits for students. Improvements have been cited in student engagement, academic achievement, critical thinking, character development, social behavior, and career readiness. Community service has been shown to produce stronger ties to the institution, exposure to careers, and increased community involvement. Inspired by these findings, the OCE has created service initiatives and programs that expose students to diverse viewpoints and ideas, help them understand their urban environment, and help students develop into leaders who are responsible citizens and active volunteers in our multicultural society.

In cooperation with the Office of Financial Aid and the Federal Work Study Program (FWSP), the OCE places students in community service work-study positions that provide students with the opportunity to finance their education and learn work skills while gaining valuable job experience. The program provides a co-curricular experience that promotes critical thinking, problem solving and ethical responsibility by exposing students to multiple view points, helping them to appreciate diversity, and showing them the nuances and challenges of working in an urban environment for a non-profit agency. New students join the program each year and a large percentage of students chose to continue participating in the program after their first year. OCE creates and maintains partnerships with local community-based organizations to provide students with the best possible work study experience for our students and community partners.

As a part of their work study assignments, students are required to participate in three Reflection Sessions each semester; these sessions incorporate the tenets of service-learning by having student’s reflect upon and process their hands-on experiences. These sessions also provide the students with opportunities to learn about valuable work place habits and professional development skills. Reflections Sessions are beneficial for the office and the university in that it allows for structured and consistent feedback on the effectiveness of the program. The end result has been an increase in students’ comprehension of and interest in social issues.

Each year, the OCE organizes several large-scale outreach programs. OCE coordinates an annual Volunteer & Internship Fair that brings non-profits from all over the metro area to Georgia State to meet and recruit student volunteers/interns. Each winter and spring break, the office supports student leaders as they organize Panther Breakaway alternative break trips, in partnership with the national Alternative Breaks program. Panther Breakaway places teams of Georgia State University students in communities in the Southeast States to engage in service experiential learning during their school break. The impact of this experience can serve as a catalyst for a life-long commitment to active citizenship, as most students choose to engage in thoughtful action towards the resolutions of social issues beyond the week of winter and spring breaks.

The OCE utilizes the online software database Volunteer Solutions database to promote service opportunities and organize student volunteer records. Volunteer Solutions offers numerous advantages for students, organizations, and the university through its ability to manage all volunteer activities, record student responses to their experiences, and keep track of agency contacts. In addition to its ability to organize OCE events online, it serves as a crucial point of contact for Georgia State students interested in volunteering. Through Volunteer Solutions students, student groups, faculty and staff can create a profile to specify what skills they have to offer, which issues they wish to address, and where in the city they prefer to volunteer. Moreover, opportunities that are not coordinated by the OCE are displayed as Spotlights, giving students the information they need to contact agencies outside the university. Perhaps most importantly, Volunteer Solutions offers tremendous benefits for the OCE and university record-keeping of student volunteer hours. All volunteer activities and non-profit relationships are recorded by the system, so that precise numbers of hours and volunteers may be tracked and measured.
Panther Cares is an OCE service initiative that encourages student organizations to think outside the box when developing their own service projects. Organizations must submit a proposal detailing their service opportunities. One project is selected monthly to receive up to $500 to assist with transportation, supplies, etc. In addition, OCE provides assistance with volunteer recruitment, advertising and project planning. This program is a collaboration between the Office of the Dean of Students and the Office of Civic Engagement.

In support of the university’s commitment to community service and civic engagement, the OCE hosts the President’s Award for Community Service and Social Action. The program honors outstanding contributions by students, student organizations, faculty and staff to the greater Atlanta community. Each winner in the five categories receives a $500 award that is donated to a university program or scholarship of their choice. The office will continue its work with the community, student organizations, faculty/staff and students to publicize the annual awards to heighten awareness of service opportunities and to inspire other Georgia State individuals to “be a part of, not apart from the community” through community service.

While the primary focus of the OCE is volunteering and service learning, the office supports the university in its efforts to develop student leaders who will be lifelong learners and active citizens who understand their civic responsibility. The Director, Lovell Lemons and Student Affairs Advisor, Jennifer Bodnar provide advisement and support to nine chartered student organizations: Circle K, Big Brothers Big Sisters of GSU, Gamma Sigma Sigma, Colleges Against Cancer, UNICEF, Habitat for Humanity GSU, Clothe Your Neighbor As Yourself, Hands on Atlanta GSU and Panther Breakaway.

Annual Department Major Events/Traditions
- Freshmen Community Plunge
- President’s Awards for Community Service and Social Action
- Alternative Spring Break (Panther Breakaway)
- MLK Service Projects
- Hunger and Homelessness Week
- International Thanksgiving
- Trick or Treat Fest
- Fall and Spring Blood Drives
- Fall and Spring Volunteer & Internship Fairs
- Community Service Awards
- National Volunteer Week

Major New Initiatives Implemented Within the Last Five Years
- The Office of Office of Civic Engagement is now part of University Career Services
- Panther Urban Connections Intern Program
- Be the Change Outreach Program
- Restructuring of the Trick or Treat Fest to include a healthy focus
- Freshman Learning Communities Service Projects
- Hunger and Homelessness Week
- Interfaith Campus and Community Service Challenge
- Interfaith Student Leadership Coalition
- Traditional Holiday Celebration with International Students
- Addition of a Professional Staff Person (Student Advisor I)

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Fall 2013