Promoting Volunteerism and Responsible Citizenship Among College Students:  
AASU’s Initiative for Civic Engagement  

By Rebecca Biggio

At Armstrong Atlantic State University, the Initiative for Civic Engagement (ICE) represents a national effort to promote democratic participation and engaged citizenship among university students. ICE is AASU’s version of the American Democracy Project (ADP). Sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the ADP strives to combine higher education and active, responsible participation in local communities (http://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/about.htm). According to Dr. Jason Tatlock, Assistant Professor of History and Coordinator for ICE, “ADP and ICE are essentially about enhancing employee and student participation in the campus, local, national, and global communities. ICE especially wants students and employees to be socially engaged professionals.”

ICE was born in the fall of 2009 after Tatlock and his colleagues, Dr. Teresa Winterhalter, Professor of English and Interim Director of Faculty Development, and Dr. Ellen Whitford, former Vice President of Academic Affairs, attended the ADP’s Annual Meeting in Baltimore in the summer of 2009. Tatlock, Winterhalter, and Dr. June Hopkins, Associate Professor and Head of the History Department at AASU, now co-coordinate the project, which, Tatlock insists, initially derived “its inspiration and support” from the vice president’s office. “As the program has developed, it has received support from throughout the university,” says Tatlock. “The president, faculty, staff, and students have eagerly participated in the Initiative for Civic Engagement.”

ICE’s proponents have been busy building a foundation for the project’s future. Last year ICE partnered with Big Brothers, Big Sisters for a recruitment event and with Step Up Savannah for an open-campus poverty simulation. “This academic year we will be joining forces with the First Year Experience on campus to promote active citizenship through the first year seminar course and freshman learning communities. We are also assisting the president’s inauguration committee in helping organize a day of service and we are sponsoring a faculty reading group on civic engagement,” Tatlock says.

Tatlock is excited about the upcoming day of service on September 18, which will celebrate the inauguration of AASU’s new president, Dr. Linda Bleicken. He is co-chairing the sub-committee organizing this event along with Chris Nowicki, newly-appointed Coordinator for Volunteer Services at AASU. The sub-committee will be working with groups like Second Harvest, Union Mission, West Broad YMCA, Hospice Savannah, and S.U.G.A. to make this event a success.

While Tatlock admits that “currently the volunteerism infrastructure at AASU has room to grow,” ICE believes that volunteerism is moving in positive directions on campus. In the future, ICE would like to see service-learning more fully incorporated into the core curriculum at AASU. Service-learning courses, in which community-based volunteer opportunities are integrated into the course curriculum, are currently discipline-specific and offered at the discretion of individual professors. For example, Tatlock’s world history students have been required to devote 10 hours of community service to a project of their choice, which they must be able to relate to course content. “Of course, volunteerism is only one part of ICE’s mission,” Tatlock adds. “We want to foster change in the curriculum and campus culture beyond volunteerism.”

ICE would like to hear from you. “Not only would we like to know how we can be of assistance, but we are interested in hearing from groups which have been impacted by the Armstrong community,” Tatlock maintains. “Armstrong is deeply connected to community enhancement and we want to help the university continue to affect the world around us in positive ways. If a group is interested in coming on campus to speak about projects in the classroom, on the quad, or with specific student organizations, let us know.” Tatlock can be reached via email at jason.tatlock@armstrong.edu or by phone at 912-344-3126. More information is available at ICE’s homepage (http://www.armstrong.edu/Departments/civic_engagement/civic_welcome).