

ADP to students: Make the choice to be civically engaged

Written by Renee Changnon, Daily Vidette Senior Staff Reporter
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Since 2003, students have been finding more ways to have their voices heard in a political and civic way with the help of the American Democracy Project, a multi-campus initiative aimed to help undergrad students become more informed and engaged in society.

According to Steven Hunt, co-chair for the ADP and professor and associate director of the School of Communication, since he began his involvement in 2006, the group has really improved and expanded on campus.

Hunt explained that initially, ADP was a way for various civically engaged groups to meet and talk about what they were doing, but they decided to change that model drastically.

“We recruited people who were excited, fired up and already doing a lot with civic engagement and kind of charge them with ‘let’s develop some new things, let’s develop some new initiatives,’” Hunt said.

Since refining what the American Democracy Project stands for, Hunt said developing initiatives to link everyone together has made ADP much stronger.

“Over the last five years, we’ve developed a number of initiatives. Things like the community engaged campus, the political engagement project, the civic engagement responsibility minor, all of those kinds of initiatives have been developed recently; they came out of that process,” Hunt said.

According to Alauna Akins, campus communication liaison for the ADP and lecturer, many students avoid the idea of civic engagement because they don’t fully understand what it means.

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“Students kind of shy away from it because they feel as if the arena for that is bigger than they are,” Akins said. “I think first, the main thing we’re trying to do now, is launch a student campaign to break down this notion of political engagement and civic engagement, and what does that mean for them as students, and what does it mean for them to active citizens in our society? So challenging them to realize that they are part of something bigger and play a role in that.”

According to Hunt, civic engagement encompasses a wide range of things that are important and should be present for one’s entire life, even after college.

“[Civic engagement] means engaging in civic life, and it means having the knowledge, the skills and the motivation to do that to be a responsible member of our democracy. That’s really what we focus on,” Hunt said.

Hunt added that civic engagement is much more than simply going to the voters booth or joining a social movement, but truly becoming fully engaged.

According to Hunt, ADP at ISU has been able to make quite a name for themselves, even among other schools in Illinois, and this summer they won the first Political Engagement Project Program of Excellence Award, sponsored by the New York Times and the National American Democracy Project.

“We’re the only state institution in Illinois with a minor in civic engagement. We’re clearly recognized as a leader nationally for the work that’s happening on this campus, and what’s cool to see is that I think if you would’ve asked students five or six years ago [about the ADP], probably not a lot would have heard of the ADP, and not everybody has heard about it now, but a lot more have,” Hunt said.

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According to Akins, students who want to do something to have their voice heard and make a difference should give ADP a chance.

“I want students to know that it’s so important that they understand their role in the world. They can be agents of change and it starts with them. Every generation comes equipped with new tools I think, to be agents of change and I want [to] challenge them to really rise to the occasion,” Akins said.

According to Akins, students who want to learn more should check out the ADP at ISU website.

“I encourage [students] to go to the website. From the website, they’ll see very distinct committees, and from those links on those pages, they can see the heads of those committees. It’s bigger than [you] think. There’s a lot that can be done. I would say that the website is the first place to start,” Akins said.

To learn more about the American Democracy Project at Illinois State University, go to americandemocracy.ilstu.edu.