

Fall 2021 NUB Instructor Guide for Block 7b: Sustainability and Civic Engagement

Overview

While NU's mission comes up in various places throughout NUB, this block is focused on it in a different way. Here we focus on general civic engagement, and we also discuss a particularly salient example of an issue where students might want to become engaged: climate change and environmental sustainability.

Peer Mentor Moments

- Peer Mentors distribute water bottles and discuss calling a State Representative
- Peer Mentors discuss their own consumer habits, and play the environmental challenge game described below, based on pp. 33-36 in the handbook.
- Peer Mentors discuss their own experiences with Service.

Highlights

- Review of NU's Mission.
- Lead discussion, and watch video on civic engagement,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9j7XUDCdEk&feature=youtu.be>
- Review p. 37 in the handbook on voting statistics.
- Watch Sustainability video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9I3Q6-ZSTI>
- Go over the Sustainability section of the handbook, esp. pp. 33-36
- Remind students to bring their handbooks for the final exam next week.

Class Outline

Troubleshooting/ Peer mentor announcements (if

a twice a week class: (2 mins) Ask students about any problems they are facing—academically, in the residence halls, dealing with family at home, relationships, etc. Encourage your peer mentor to give advice about how to handle those problems. Peer Mentors make announcements about things to do on campus this week.

Discussion of Civic Engagement: (6 mins) Feel free to approach this topic as you see fit, but do make sure to discuss the link between a liberal arts education and responsible civic engagement. Here's our recommended approach: first, ask (or have your peer mentor ask) which students are registered to vote, and then have a show of hands for who has ever voted before. Don't be surprised if not too many hands go up; some of your students might not even be 18 yet! Then ask: "Why do you think we're asking you this?" or "Why is voting important?" See what students say and add your own points as necessary. You want to be sure to note that a liberal arts education is designed to transform students into informed and engaged citizens, without whom a well-functioning democracy is impossible!

- Next, show them the graphs and commentary on the graphs on p. 37 of the handbook. There are two points to make here:
 - (1) Older people vote at much higher rates than younger people (first graph). Ask the students why they think that is, and whether they can think of any problems or benefits that might arise from this pattern.
 - (2) More educated people vote at higher rates than less educated people (second graph). Ask students why they think this is, and whether they can think of any problems or benefits that might arise from this pattern.

Overview of Civics Tab on the NUB Website: (10 mins) There's a bunch of information on the NUB website about voter registration and the importance of voting. Here's what we think the best approach for covering this would be:

- Begin by playing 'Ten Terrible Reasons Not to Vote (and Two Good Ones)' (3.5 mins), and follow up by asking the students questions like the following:
 - Can you think of any other popular reasons not to vote? Do you think those reasons are good?
 - Did you agree that most of the "reasons" people give for not voting are bad?
- Ask the students for a volunteer to get registered to vote, change their voter registration, or request an absentee ballot (if there's no upcoming election then maybe not this last one). Click the relevant link and show them how to do it—the process is pretty quick if you want to do the whole thing.
- Make the point that voting is just the *beginning* of civic participation: it might be useful to point out the TownHall feature of Facebook in connection with this. (There's a link explaining this under the Civics tab.) **If there's time, you might show the 'Bridging the Partisan Divide' video (3 mins).**
- Ask the students what they care about, and encourage them to become politically engaged in order to advance or protect those things.
- One thing we all should care about is the health of our common home, the planet earth. There are controversial aspects of the environmental movement, but *that* isn't one of them. Still, the political will to address such problems is sometimes lacking. (E.g., the tragedy of the commons.) This is a nice segue to...

Peer Mentors Hand Out Water Bottles: (5 mins) Peer Mentors hand out bottles. They can use these every day!

Sustainability Video: (3 mins) Watch and discuss the (10 minute) video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9I3Q6-ZSTI>

Good discussion questions following the video might include:

- Was this new information for you? Did you talk about climate change in high school? Did your family talk about climate change? Go around the room and ask these questions of each student.
- Most of us in the United States use so many resources that it would take at least 4 Earths for the whole world to live the way that we do. Is it fair that we use so many resources? Why or why not?
- Why do you think the Catholic Church is interested in this issue? What does it have to do with religion?
- How would a Vincentian—motivated by concern for the poor and marginalized—approach the issue of climate change?

- **Note:** Our goal here is to communicate the importance of the problem, and the fact that we have a moral responsibility to address it. As far as solutions go, that's more controversial. Feel free to tout your favored solution, but do mention the others. (Cap and Trade, Regulation, Hi-Tech (terraforming) solutions, etc.)

Sustainability Game (5 mins): Your Peer Mentor should go through the list of environmental actions on pp. 33-36 and get a show of hands from the class on each one. The student who raises his or her hand the most "wins"! Just bragging rights, no prizes!

- Why do we study sustainability (and diversity, for that matter) in NUB? Because they are both NU values! See pp. 35-36 of the planner for NU's commitment to sustainability. How might NU become even more "green"? Are there any improvements to our campus you might be able to think of? If so, how might you try to implement these changes? Perhaps you could join an environmental club on campus Which clubs are applicable? (NU Goes Green, Outdoor Club, Human Rights Club, because this is also an issue of justice between people.)

Reminder: Remind students to bring their handbooks for the final exam next week.