

# Community Leadership & Civil Advocacy Certificate

*Shaping a more engaged workforce for the Mountain State*



## **What is the Community Leadership & Civil Advocacy Certificate?**

The Community Leadership & Civil Advocacy Certificate (CLCA) **prepares students to be community leaders and gives them the skills to advocate** for themselves, their employers, and the causes that they care about.

## **Why the Community Leadership & Civil Advocacy Certificate?**

The CLCA addresses three challenges faced by WV:

1. high levels of political **polarization**,
2. **low levels of civic and community engagement** of young people, and
3. **young people are moving out of the state**, affecting the state's workforce.

Across the country, states are becoming more polarized. People are moving from places where they feel they no longer fit in to states that are more aligned with their political views. Red states are becoming redder and blue states are becoming bluer. In WV, anecdotal evidence in many newspaper articles reports that young people are following this trend. They do not feel that the political climate is welcoming of their views and opinions. They find it easier to leave their home state than to stay and work to make WV a place where they want to live and raise their families.

All factors combined, **the number of young adults (ages 20 - 34) in West Virginia has declined by 6.5% from 2014 to 2021.**

Making matters worse, a report done by the Institute for Citizens and Scholars shares that **1 in 3 young people do not feel informed enough to participate in political decisions in their communities.** A similar number are both civically disengaged and are not connected to any community groups such as civic groups, nonprofits, or faith communities.

The news gets even worse for WV. A study done by the Center for Information Research on Civic Learning and Engagement found that **60% of rural millennials lack access to political life** and live in what can be characterized as "civic deserts." Young people in civic deserts do not see opportunities to affect change in their communities. They are 10% less likely to vote. **They often believe that voting and civic institutions—from Congress to local nonprofits—do not help the community.**

**The exodus of young people who feel powerless, marginalized, and disengaged is leaving WV with an aging population, lacking a sufficient workforce, and more polarized than ever.**

## **What does the Community Leadership & Civil Advocacy Certificate do for West Virginia?**

Studies have shown that young people benefit from being involved in their communities. They often are more satisfied with life, feel greater attachment to their neighborhoods, and feel more connected to their communities.

The CLCA will **teach students to identify opportunities for civic engagement and give them the skills to become leaders in their communities. They will learn how to advocate for themselves, so that they can take action to improve the conditions that they see as barriers to them staying in their communities.**

We will also be **training a generation of community leaders** who can hold their own political opinions while respecting those of others which will further reduce polarization and marginalization of minority political parties and create space for greater collaboration across the ideological spectrum.

Keeping young people in WV will **create a more attractive workforce** for businesses already in the state and industries considering moving into the state.

## How does the Community Leadership & Civil Advocacy Certificate work?

The CLCA Certificate uses a combination of **online self-paced modules, virtual workshops, hands-on learning, participation in civic activities and mentoring** to help students develop their leadership and advocacy skills and explore civic engagement.

**The Stubblefield Institute is building a network of state and regional organizations** to offer primarily virtual content to college students within the state who would like to complete the CLCA.

The Stubblefield Institute has also begun building a network of schools within WV who will collaborate with the Stubblefield Institute to offer the Community Leadership & Civil Advocacy Certificate to their students. The schools that have expressed interest in participating are **Potomac State College of West Virginia University, Blue Ridge Community & Technical College, Eastern WV Community & Technical College, Glenville State University, West Virginia Wesleyan University and West Virginia Northern Community College**. These partnerships give students at these smaller schools the opportunity to receive education and training often only available at larger schools. It will also create a network of college students and recent college graduates who are equipped to advocate for themselves and others within the state.

Throughout the academic year (August through May), the **students meet monthly to learn together**.

Between monthly meetings, **students engage in their own communities to practice and enhance the skills that they are learning, to learn more about the community around them and to begin building networks with community decision makers** and people who share their interests and passions.

The structure of the program is based on the Social Change Model for Leadership Development, developed by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles.

### The CLCA is divided into three sections:

- 1. Leadership and Advocacy,**
- 2. Creating a Culture of Respect,**
- 3. Community Engagement.**

**Leadership and Advocacy:** Students will (1) be introduced to the fundamentals of leadership and advocacy, (2) assess their own leadership strengths and set personal development goals, (3) gain an awareness of the legislative process, and (4) expand their understanding regarding the complexity of community issues. They will also begin to connect with legislators and other community leaders.

**Creating a Culture of Respect:** Students will develop competencies for (1) building social trust, (2) creating systems of mutual support, (3) examining the challenges of building inclusive communities, and (4) understanding of the power dynamics in governance, communities and groups. Students will also practice transforming groups into teams through common purpose and develop the skills necessary to engage in constructive dialogue and to navigate conflict.

**Community Engagement:** Students will develop an awareness of community dynamics, resources, challenges and opportunities by participating in community service and civic engagement opportunities. Additionally, students will build and diversify relationships across perceived differences throughout the community. In this section, students will take the lead in identifying qualifying experiences in their own community. For example, a student might organize a food drive for a local food pantry, attend a county Chamber of Commerce luncheon that is hosting its local legislators to talk about the upcoming legislative session, or go to a workshop on grant writing for nonprofits.

**When students have completed this 50-hour certificate, they will receive a physical certificate of completion that can be listed in their resumes and a digital badge to display in their digital portfolios.**