

## **Report of Central College**

Central College of Pella, Iowa, is a private, four-year liberal arts college. Central is known for its academic rigor, leadership and character development, global experiential learning, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and sustainability education, athletics, and service.

For more than 100 years, Central has valued its covenant with the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Central's connection with the RCA is invaluable to students learning to live out their faith through service to God and humanity. RCA members serve on Central's board of trustees, and Reformed churches support students through Central's Journey Scholarship Fund. RCA students also can receive the Heritage Award. Many Central graduates go on to serve as leaders in RCA congregations worldwide.

Central's mission integrates career preparation with developing values essential to responsible citizenship. Central empowers graduates to serve in local, national, and international communities. A Central education prepares students for civic responsibility, to "learn to do right; seek justice" (Isaiah 1:17). Through activities, courses, service opportunities, and Central's relationship with the RCA, students learn to take their place in the world as justice seekers.

### **Robben Island Project**

This past year, two Central seniors, Efrain Garcia and Sarah Van Weelden, were among six college students nationwide chosen by the RCA for its Robben Island Project to explore "creating a movement that addresses racism from Gen Y and Gen Z cultural perspectives and capacities," according to Earl James, the RCA's coordinator for African American Black Ministries and Advocacy. "Efrain and Sarah are both gems," he reported, and thanked Central for sending them his way. Garcia says his involvement in the project "exceeded all expectations" and was "life-changing."

### **Campus Ministries**

Campus Ministries students plan and lead a variety of activities and events on campus.

#### *The Calm*

Every week, an average of 60 students participate in The Calm. Held on Sunday evenings and described as "the calm before the storm of a busy week," the service seeks to encourage community through prayer, media, and contemporary worship.

#### *Fundraisers*

Campus Ministry holds several annual fundraisers for organizations including World Vision, Water to Thrive, Freedom House, and Many Hands for Haiti.

#### *Services and Discipleship*

Many students are involved with local churches, including assisting with worship services, with youth and children's ministries, and by participating in music groups and Bible studies. About 27 students also are paired with college faculty and staff mentors and serve as Campus Ministries disciples.

### *Mission Trips*

Mission trips allow Campus Ministries participants to serve others while growing their faith. During spring break 2019, Campus Ministries completed a mission trip to Refugio County in Texas to help with continued hurricane recovery efforts. Students also traveled to Mission, Texas, to help build homes for families near the Mexico border.

### *Leadership Teams*

More than 40 students participate in six weekly leadership team meetings to plan worship, organize campus and community outreach, participate in hands-on ministry with local organizations, fight issues of global injustice, play music, and operate sound systems and media at worship services.

### *Small Groups and Bible Studies*

Nearly a score of groups—some led by staff, some by students—address a variety of topics ranging from the basics of the faith to various book, Bible, and music studies.

## **Community Service**

Service plays a major role on Central's campus. It is expressed through student organizations, classes with service-learning components, and independent projects by students, faculty, and staff. Each year, more than 300 students participate in service learning, much of it facilitated by the college's Center for Community Based Learning, which manages reciprocal partnerships with more than 150 nonprofit organizations and agencies in the Pella region.

Community service teaches civic engagement. By engaging with the community, students practice treating others with care and respect. Living a servant-hearted life means understanding one's responsibility to others and the pursuit of justice for all. Central is committed to teaching civic responsibility through multiple activities.

### *All Campus Service Day*

Central's 2019 Service Day took place on October 29. Each year on Service Day, classes are canceled so that all members of the Central family can collaborate on projects that address a community need. Nearly 700 students, faculty, and staff served at 50 locations in Central Iowa—many at faith-based organizations.

### *Coursework*

Many courses at Central include a service component such as bowling with people with disabilities and helping low-income people with free income tax preparation under professional supervision. In a 2019 assessment of such courses at Central, more than 84 percent of students said the courses "strengthen my ethic of social and civic responsibility," helped them "learn how to work more collaboratively on real-world problems" and "relate knowledgeable and sensitively to a person of different cultural perspectives"; 74 percent said they helped "develop a greater sense of personal responsibility."

### *Food Security Projects*

The college annually participates in a Crop Hunger Walk, an initiative of Church World Service that raises funds to end hunger in the U.S. and around the world. This year, Central's Crop walk raised \$6,248 in contributions. The college also raised \$3,341 in contributions to the Pella Food Shelf.

### *Season of Gratitude*

In fall 2019, several college departments and community partners collaborated for Season of Gratitude in Action. Activities included an Oxfam Hunger Banquet, a coat drive, a food drive, a wellness fair, making mats for the homeless, assembling meals for Meals from the Heartland, writing letters to veterans, a Global Care Fair that taught ethical and sustainable shopping practices, and more.

### *Individual Service Commitments*

Students and faculty individually pursue a number of service commitments. Students often initiate their own service or social justice-oriented groups.

### *Martin Luther King Jr. Day*

This year's observance included a display of photography related to Martin Luther King in the Maytag student center, including his visit to Central, a "What's Your Dream?" board where students could write their dream for Central and their future, a visit from the Traveling True Black History Museum of the African American experience, encouragement for students to participate in the Iowa caucuses, and a Martin Luther King Day service day activity creating more than 150 Mindfulness Kits for schools and nonprofits to use in promoting children's mental health.

### *Red Rock Rocks*

Held during Welcome Week after students arrive in August, this event exposes incoming first-year students to Central's service ethos. More than 40 student participants picked up litter at Lake Red Rock.

### *School Visits*

Central's community-based learning program collaborates with the admission department to offer college visits to students served by Central's community partners. This strengthens the college's goal of increasing college access to students with diverse socioeconomic and cultural perspectives. The college partners annually with the Children and Family Urban Movement, Des Moines's Findley Elementary and Harding Middle Schools, and Des Moines Oakridge Neighborhood Services to provide outreach and educational programming and college visits for underserved youth. About 400 K–12 students benefited from these visits in 2019.

According to a 2019 survey of representatives of three of these organizations, the youth enjoyed the activities and expanded their understanding of college.

One organization representative wrote, "After our kids visit Central, they compare it to other colleges and universities, and they all say they want to go to Central when they graduate from high school. When students get to actively engage in learning with professors and college-aged

students, there is a lasting impact that our students never forget.” Another added, “it’s the most meaningful campus visit our college partners offer.”

### **Financial Aid**

In the 2019–2020 academic year, 220 students are receiving a total of \$259,560 in Community Service Awards. These scholarships are based on prospective students’ past community engagement and their future plans for engagement in and after college.

### **Conclusion**

Central takes seriously its mission of preparing students to lead. Part of this preparation is learning what it means to serve and how to change the world for the better. Both lessons are integral to the life of a Christian and central to the college’s mission. The college’s relationship with the RCA is central to this mission. Central values its relationship with the RCA and the support—through gifts, guidance, and prayer—that the RCA offers this vital undertaking.