

## Report of Central College

Central College in 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, NIV). Through activities, courses, service opportunities, and Central's relationship with the RCA, students learn to take their place in the world as justice seekers.

### Campus Ministries

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

#### *The Calm*

An average of 65 students participate in The Calm, a weekly worship service.

#### *Fundraisers*

Campus Ministries holds several fundraisers annually for organizations including World Vision, Water to Thrive, Freedom House, and Many Hands for Haiti. In fall 2020, students put on drives for Crisis Intervention Services and Love Packages and began working on fundraising efforts toward a third well for Water to Thrive.

#### *Mission Trips*

Mission trips allow students to serve others while growing their faith. Campus Ministries is dedicated to global missions and has traveled to Haiti, Tanzania, Mississippi, and a variety of other locations over the years. Due to COVID-19, students only traveled to Mission, Texas, to help build homes for families near the Mexico border in January 2020.

#### *Services and Discipleship*

Many students are involved with local churches, including assisting with worship services and youth/children's ministries. In addition to connections with local churches, about 40 students have been paired with faculty, upperclassmen, and staff mentors in a discipleship program designed to help grow their faith and relationships with God.

### *Leadership Teams*

More than 40 students participated 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; and play music and run sound systems and media at worship services. Events that resulted from these groups include the Global Care Fair, Angel Tree Nights, Pop-Up Bible Studies, service opportunities at Pella Food Shelf, and more.

### *Small Groups and Bible Studies*

Nearly 20 groups—some led by staff, some by students—address a variety of topics ranging from the basics of 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. In 2020, more than 200 students participated 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.

### *Service Learning*

Service learning strengthens cognitive, vocational, social, emotional, behavioral, and moral competencies. Students are placed in settings in which they can provide direct service to community members, such as teaching English as a second language, leading fitness activities with seniors, assisting with after-school programs, and serving food to families who are food insecure.

Service learning was cut short in the spring 2020 semester due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the challenges posed by the pandemic reinforced the crucial nature of our community partners' work with vulnerable populations.

As a service-learning student, Sami Craig, class of 2021, will help manage food rescue data for Eat Greater Des Moines (EGDM), a central Iowa-based nonprofit that facilitates and builds connections to strengthen the area's food system. Craig says she is looking forward to seeing the impact EGDM has on the community and to gaining valuable knowledge for how she can make an impact, too.

### *All Campus Service Day*

Central's 2020 Service Day took place on October 6, 2020. Each year on Service Day, classes are canceled so all members of the Central family can collaborate on projects that address a community need. More than 650 students, faculty, and staff served at 50 locations in Central

Iowa—many at faith-based organizations. In total, there were 1,821 hours donated with an economic impact in the community of more than \$43,000.

#### *Coursework*

Many courses at Central include a service component. Despite restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic, students continued to safely serve the community, both in person and virtually, through service links to individual courses. In fact, many students were conducting Zoom-based English language-learning lessons with students at Des Moines Public Schools, who themselves were engaged in remote learning. Others were safely assisting with pod-type learning in person at Des Moines Public Schools or Mahaska County Head Start.

As a result, in fall 2020, 79 percent of students developed a greater sense of personal responsibility, while 93 percent of students reported their service experience helped to “appreciate the diversity of cultures present in the United States.” Eighty-six percent reported becoming “more sensitive to the hardships and needs of others.”

#### *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, the Crop Hunger Walk was held virtually because of the pandemic. The event raised \$10,411 in contributions. The college also raised \$2,602 in contributions to the Pella Food Shelf.

#### *Season of Gratitude*

In fall 2020, several college departments and community partners collaborated for Season of Gratitude in Action. Activities included writing letters to veterans and first responders, a coat drive for refugees, two food drives, crocheting homeless mats made of used plastic grocery bags, and celebrating Giving Tuesday to encourage giving to nonprofits.

#### *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*

The observance in 2021 included an in-class experience facilitated by faculty, during which students shared their dreams for 2021 alongside a display commemorating King; a Martin Luther King Jr. Day service activity to create tie fleece blankets for displaced, abused, and disadvantaged children; and a virtual event presented by Fred Saffold, titled “What They Didn’t Teach You in History Class—America’s Hidden True Black History.” Saffold used historic artifacts, documents, and photographs to explore solutions for racial equity and inclusion.

#### *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' Findley Elementary and Harding Middle Schools, and the Des Moines Oakridge Neighborhood Services to provide outreach and educational programming and college visits for underserved youth.

Prior to the pandemic, approximately 300 K–12 Harding Middle School students visited Central early in the spring 2020 semester. Students learned about physics with a model roller coaster, skin cells and bees with microscopes, and how to play the ukulele; watched a glass-blowing demonstration; and participated in a team-building exercise.

### **Financial Aid**

In the 2020–2021 academic year, 140 students are receiving a total of \$161,482 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. The global pandemic challenged students to serve the community in new ways. These lessons are integral to the life of a Christian and central to the college's mission, and the college's relationship with the RCA is essential 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.