

Report of Central College

Central College of Pella, Iowa, is a private, four-year, liberal arts college. Central is known for its academic rigor and leadership formation and for cultivating diversity of thought and culture through the arts and sciences, professional fields of study, and experiential learning.

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 good; 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.

Campus Ministries

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

The Calm

An average of 100 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 2021, students sponsored drives for Crisis Intervention Services and Love Packages and began working on fundraising efforts toward a third well for Water to Thrive.

Outreach

Campus Ministries is involved with Urban Bike Ministry in Des Moines. This outreach serves the homeless population of Des Moines. Students ride bikes to homeless camps throughout the city to deliver meals and blankets to people in need.

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. Two international trips—one to London, England, and one to Honduras—and one domestic trip to Kentucky took place in spring 2022. In London, students learned how to better minister within Muslim populations; in Honduras, students served older adults in a senior citizen center; and in Kentucky, students worked with a pre-existing ministry to bless and encourage people in economically vulnerable areas of Appalachia.

Services and Discipleship

Many students are involved with local churches, including assisting with worship services and youth and 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 relationship with God.

Leadership Teams

More than 40 students participated in 6 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 both 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 the Christian faith to various book, Bible, and music. In addition, Campus Ministries has been writing and emailing a daily Lenten devotional to the campus community as a way of sharing faith within the community and to encourage one another in our Christian walks.

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 2021, 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 and Des Moines regions.

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-language learners, leading fitness activities with seniors, assisting with after-school programs, and serving food to families who are food insecure.

Service learning continued to feel the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic through 2021 with fewer in-person opportunities for service. However, our community partners forged ahead and continue their crucial work with vulnerable populations. We are thankful to be able to support that work through service learning at Central.

One example is a service-learning student, Abigail Malecha '22, who helped develop a curriculum focusing on teaching skills for how to navigate the public transportation system in Des Moines. This curriculum will be used to equip and empower victims of human trafficking through the work of Dorothy's House in Des Moines. Malecha says that her work at Dorothy's House helped her understand the various processes that go into creating a program for vulnerable populations. Malecha is now working as a full-time staff member at Dorothy's House.

All Campus Service Day

Central's 2021 Service Day took place on October 5, 2021. Each year on Service Day, the college makes it possible for everyone to participate so all members of the Central family can collaborate on projects that address a community need. More than 630 students, faculty, and staff served at 50 locations in Central Iowa—many at faith-based organizations. In total, there were 1,975.5 hours donated with an economic impact in the community of more than \$49,000.

Coursework

Many courses at Central include a service component. Despite continued 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 during the spring 2021 semester. 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 in-person pod-type learning at Des Moines Public Schools or Mahaska County Head Start.

In fall 2021, the college resumed in-person service learning. The majority of Central's community partners began accepting in-person volunteers, and Central students were able to serve face-to-face. This not only enhances learning outcomes, it also responds to community partners' needs more effectively.

As a result, in fall 2021, 79 percent of students developed a greater sense of personal responsibility, while 93 percent of students reported their service experience helped them 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, in collaboration with several local churches and community members. In 2021, the walk returned to an in-person event—after being held virtually in 2020 due to the pandemic—and was held on September 26. The event raised \$8,026 in contributions. The college also raised \$1,994 in contributions to Pella Food Shelf.

Season of Gratitude

In fall 2021, several college departments and community partners collaborated for Season of Gratitude. Activities included writing letters to veterans, first responders, and older adults; a coat drive for refugees; two food drives; crocheting homeless mats made of used plastic grocery

bags; observing World Kindness Day with friendship and a gratitude board; 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

Classes were not in session on Martin Luther King Jr. Day as they have been in years past. The day was instead filled with educational opportunities for students and faculty. Students participated in service projects, trained to become mentors in violence prevention, and/or chose from many different academic seminars on racial justice, bias, inequality, and more.

Mike Regan Jr. delivered a keynote address titled “The Journey Continues: Athlete Activism and the Fight for Social Justice.” The day concluded with a vigil at the Peace Pole located on south Geisler lawn on Central’s campus. The pole, installed in 2006, is a hand-crafted monument that displays the message “May Peace Prevail on Earth.”

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. These visits are different from typical college visits primarily because these groups of students all represent underserved, first-generation families who have never been on a college campus before. This strengthens the college’s goal of increasing college access to students with diverse socioeconomic and cultural perspectives. It also strengthens the college’s partnership with the community.

The college partners annually with Des Moines’ Findley Elementary and Harding Middle Schools and North High School to provide outreach and educational programming and college visits for underserved youth.

In 2021, Central’s Community-Based Learning Department hosted two visits: one from Genesis Youth Foundation and one from North High School in Des Moines. Students learned about bees and examined them under a microscope, made slime in a science lab, ate lunch in Central Market, and participated in a college prep activities exercise.

Financial Aid

In the 2021–2022 academic year, 94 students are receiving a total of \$110,440 in Community Service Awards. These scholarships are based on prospective students’ past community engagement and their future plans for engagement in and after college. Students also enjoy a tuition price of \$19,800 in addition to generous scholarships and awards.

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. 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.