

## Report of Central College

Central College in Pella, Iowa, is a private, four-year college known for its academic rigor, engaged citizenship and character formation, experiential learning, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), athletics, and service. For more information about Central College, visit [central.edu](http://central.edu).

For more than 100 years, Central has valued its affiliation with the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Central's connection with the RCA is invaluable for students learning to live out their faith through service to God and humanity. RCA members serve on Central's board of trustees. 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.

Central's mission integrates career preparation with developing values essential to responsible citizenship. Central empowers graduates to serve and do a world of good in local, national, and international communities. A Central education prepares students for civic responsibility, to "let their light shine before others, so that they may see your good works" (Matthew 5:16). 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 and staff plan and lead a variety of activities and events on campus as a body of Christ-followers with a desire for people to know the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. The mission is to "Make, Grow, and Send disciples of Jesus Christ who have a love for the Word of God, prayer, worship, fellowship, and service."

#### *The Calm*

On average, 40-70 students participate in The Calm, a weekly worship service to start the week focused and study a book of the Bible or walk through a topical series. This year, students studied the book of Philippians and completed a series called BLESSED.

#### *Outreach*

Campus Ministries is involved with Urban Bike Ministry, World Vision, Love Packages, Single Parent Provision, Jonathan's House for Orphans, Angel Tree, and other service organizations. Additionally, Central students travel to Des Moines, Iowa, and join others to distribute food, blankets, gloves, and hats to people in need. Students are looking for opportunities to serve at a children's hospital and also support a refugee family hosted in Central housing this year.

Campus Ministries holds several fundraisers annually for organizations in which they are involved as well as domestic and international mission trips.

### *Mission Trips*

Mission trips allow students to serve others while growing their faith. Campus Ministries is dedicated to global missions and has traveled to Texas, Tanzania, Kentucky, New York, London, Haiti, Honduras, and other locations over the years.

Over spring break 2024, Campus Ministries plans to travel to Mission, Texas, to work alongside a local church and to Amory, Mississippi, to serve alongside Eight Days of Hope. While in these locations, students will worship daily, complete construction projects, and do outreach in the local community. In May 2024, they plan to take their second international trip to Tanzania to serve alongside Hope of the Nations. During fall break 2023, Campus Ministries led men's and women's retreats in Des Moines and Rathbun, Iowa, to serve, provide fellowship, dive into the Word, and be refreshed!

Over winter break, 40 students went to Mission, Texas, to build homes, serve near the border, help at a local church, and host a carnival. This tradition has become a favorite for students!

### *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, 32 students and community members are participating in a discipleship program designed to help grow their faith and relationship with God.

### *Small Groups and Bible Studies*

Campus Ministries encourages small group studies to build trust and faith. This year's Bible study groups expanded to include women, men, co-ed, and first-year student groups. Plus, 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 encouraging one another in our Christian walks. Students particularly enjoy the homemade Lent breakfasts made by local churches during this season!

### **Civic Engagement**

Service plays a major role on Central's campus. It is expressed through student organizations, classes with service-learning components, and projects by students, faculty, and staff.

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. The Career Development and Civic Engagement Office places students where 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. More than 600 art kits were assembled for the Pella Community Art Center.

Service Day makes it possible for all members of the Central family to collaborate on projects that address a community need. In 2023, 701 students, faculty, and staff served at 36 locations in Central Iowa—many at faith-based organizations. In total, there were 2,227 hours donated on a single day with an economic impact to our community partners of \$61,622.

### *Coursework*

Central has nine service-learning courses across four academic departments. On average, 120 to 140 students per semester register for these courses. Students were surveyed after their experience and asked how the course helped them.

- 79 percent of students better understand how communities work or function.
- 74 percent of students became more sensitive to the hardships and needs of others.
- 68 percent of students increased their curiosity about cultural groups with whom they had not had direct experience.

Students often initiate their service or social justice-oriented groups with a faculty member. In summer 2023, three students completed a service-learning module with two nonprofit organizations and received academic credit. One notable example involved two students working with United Way of Central Iowa, an organization providing community resources in areas of essential need, educational success, economic opportunity, health, and wellbeing. The Central students supported their IT department, analyzed data, and provided the organization with information to reach a wider audience.

### *Season of Gratitude and Food Security Projects*

In fall 2023, college departments and community partners collaborated for Season of Gratitude events. The campus community wrote 40 positive, seasonal greeting cards sent to adults living at Hearthstone WesleyLife in Pella. Other activities included coffee cup compliments with words of encouragement, observing World Kindness Day with friendship and a gratitude board, a food drive for the Pella Food Pantry, crocheting mats made of used plastic grocery bags for homeless individuals, a coat drive for refugees, and celebrating Giving Tuesday to encourage giving to nonprofits.

### *Martin Luther King Jr. Day*

Central honors Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy of equity, justice, and peace with a day of alternative learning for students. In 2023, students attended an opening plenary session and then selected from 15 concurrent academic sessions and five service projects throughout the day. In 2024, the extreme weather postponed activities. Fortunately, all the planned sessions have been scheduled throughout the semester, which allows students to attend more sessions. Programs address the core values of King's vision for social justice and acceptance.

### *School Visits*

Central's community-based learning program collaborates with the admission office to offer college visits to students served by Central's community partners. These visits are different from typical college visits primarily because these students represent underserved, first-generation families who have never been on a college campus. This increases college access to students with diverse socioeconomic and cultural perspectives. It also strengthens the college's partnership with the community.

Civic engagement and admission staff welcomed:

- 48 students from Findley Elementary School's third-grade class from Des Moines, Iowa. This partnership with the By Degrees Foundation was established in the fall of 2015.
- Des Moines North High School seniors, who were part of North High Celebration as the first third-grade class that Central adopted.
- 100 Harding Middle School eighth graders from Des Moines, Iowa.
- 200 Pella Middle School eighth graders.

### **College Affordability**

Individuals with a servitude heart come from all corners of the earth. Central addresses college affordability with competitive tuition to state schools (\$20,988). In 2023, we began giving all incoming students a \$1,000 Journey Scholarship. The goal is to award students the scholarship each year they attend Central. The Journey Scholarships are 100 percent donor-funded.

### **Conclusion**

Central believes in and fully commits to its mission of preparing students to be leaders for good. Part of this preparation is learning what it means to serve and how to change the world for the better. Central values its relationship with the RCA and the support—through gifts, guidance and prayer—that the RCA offers this vital undertaking.