

What is the Civic University?

The Civic University (CU) is a partnership between the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at Cal State L.A. and the Office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti. The Civic University arose from a shared belief among us that there are immense gap in public knowledge and understanding of how Los Angeles city government works, and that as a result, people in many communities feel that they cannot effectively influence their own government.

This Neighborhood Council CU program is a joint project of the Pat Brown Institute at Cal State L.A., the Office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, and of course the City's nearly 100 Neighborhood Councils.

Funding for this program comes from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, aka Empower LA, and AT&T.

How does it work?

The CU provides an educational program targeted to a particular audience that leads to a non-credit certificate in local government issued by the University's PaGE program (College of Professional and Global Education).

Rather than individual students signing up for the course, the CU is designed around requests that a program be developed for a specific group of constituents. An example would be a block of community organizations, or staff members for local elected officials. In this case, the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners asked for a program tailored to the needs of representatives of Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils.

The CU had an initial trial run last year, with a two-session program presented to community activists. Several Neighborhood Council activists participated in that program.

The Neighborhood Council CU that is planned for this spring will be the first one that offers a non-credit certificate in local government from Cal State L.A. You will be a member of the first group to pass through the formal CU program.

What is the focus of the program?

The CU operates on the premise that when it comes to local government, a well-informed community will be a more active one. We want to make it possible for people to have a greater impact on government by increasing their understanding of how the system is designed and how it actually works. We are not only interested in explaining the formal processes of local government (“how an ordinance becomes a law”) but why things happen as they do. What are the important access points within local government?

You will find this program to be different from a traditional training curriculum. We will not be teaching about how to lead a citizen board; or how to comply with the Brown Act; or how to organize the budget of a Neighborhood Council. Rather, we will be examining how Neighborhood Councils can best achieve their mission and attain productive influence at city hall.

The CU education program first presents information about how local government works in Los Angeles. Even those who are closely involved with City Hall are often surprised to discover that there is a lot they do not know about its governance and operations. The second part of the education program explores how this power system can be influenced in order to bring about beneficial results for the community.

Some specific topics that will be covered include:

- An overview of the power centers at Los Angeles City Hall (roles of Mayor, City Council, other elected officials, commissions, CAO/CLA)
- Who has power in the community and can influence City Hall (roles of key organized groups)
- Where Neighborhood Councils fit into the governing structure of the city (what the Charter says and how it actually works)
- How and why the budget process works the way it does
- How data are developed and used at City Hall, and how Neighborhood Councils can use data

- The city's election system, both for city elections and for elections within Neighborhood Councils
- How to encourage positive, productive reform in local government; what ideas have been proposed and what are your ideas?)

A detailed curriculum with selected readings will be made available to participants.

Who are the teachers?

Instructors will be under the supervision of Dr. Raphael Sonenshein, Executive Director of the Pat Brown Institute at Cal State L.A., and author of three books on Los Angeles politics and government. Dr. Sonenshein participated in the creation of the neighborhood council system through charter reform in 1999, and served as executive director of the Neighborhood Council Review Commission. Teaching staff will be drawn from among the PBI, other Cal State L.A. faculty, and the Mayor's Office and will be trained by the PBI.

What are the logistics?

The program will be conducted over the course of three evenings: Thursday, April 2; Wednesday, April 8; and Wednesday, April 15. The sessions will be from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm, with a break in the middle. Between 6:00 pm and 6:30 pm, light refreshments will be served, and networking is encouraged.

The classes will take place at the Ronald Deaton Police Administration Building auditorium, on First and Main Streets in downtown Los Angeles (across from Los Angeles City Hall). Parking will be provided.

Who can attend?

The Neighborhood Council CU is reserved for board members of the Neighborhood Councils. The current funding only allows Neighborhood Councils to select 2 board members, 1 woman and 1 man, to attend. Because this is a certificate program, attendees must commit to attending all 3 classes and working on a project to address an issue in their community, such as land use, public safety, etc. The goal is to create a network of knowledgeable board members per region to support one another's efforts on common issues.

How does a Neighborhood Council select the attendees?

Neighborhood Councils can agendize the selection of the members to attend the CU or vote to give the authority to the President/Chair to select the members if the President/Chair doesn't already have the authority to do so in the bylaws or standing rules.

Agenda Item Examples:

Discussion and possible action to select two board members, 1 woman and 1 man, to attend the Neighborhood Council Civic University certificate program on or about April 2nd, April 8th and April 15th. Selected board members must commit to attending all three classes and work on a project to address an issue in their community.

Discussion and possible action to give the President/Chair the authority to select two board members, 1 woman and 1 man, to attend the Neighborhood Council Civic University certificate program on or about April 2nd, April 8th and April 15th. Selected board members must commit to attending all three classes and work on a project to address an issue in their community.

EmpowerLA will provide a link to the attendees to register.
(<http://empowerla.org/civic-university-registration/>)

If you have any further questions, please contact EmpowerLA at (213) 978-1551 or by sending an email to EmpowerLA@lacity.org.