



Strengthening Engagement through Education for Democracy

SEED

Overview



The International Foundation for Electoral Systems' (IFES) civic education programming empowers citizens to participate more effectively in their country's electoral and political processes and provides them with the tools they need to hold their elected representatives accountable for effectual governance. When citizens are not empowered to effectively exercise and defend their or others' democratic rights and responsibilities, the opportunity for disinformation, corruption and electoral fraud increases, thereby amplifying the potential for leaders to take undemocratic actions that threaten human rights, stability and prosperity.

IFES' work to support informed, mindful and active civic participation through intersectional approaches designed to support diverse groups such as young women, ethnic and religious minority youth and youth with disabilities expands the potential for all citizens to shape their democracies and to be represented in decision-making processes.

To this end, in 2010, IFES developed a global, university-level civic education approach: Strengthening

Engagement through Education for Democracy (SEED). SEED is designed to empower young people to better understand the democratic process and each citizen's role and responsibility within it. The SEED curriculum, materials and methodology are country-tailored and designed to foster students' democratic values and attitudes while equipping them with the knowledge and skills essential to effective and informed citizenship in digital age democracies as well as closing democratic spaces. Universities have proven to facilitate safe spaces for young people to expand their understanding of democracy and foster community-building among engaged students and their networks.

Through SEED, IFES has worked with universities and education specialists in Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and Bangladesh to develop fully accredited university-level curricula to introduce citizens to fundamental concepts of democratic citizenship, systems of government, civic participation and human rights, while building capacity through hands-on, real-world learning experiences.

The core methodology of SEED focuses on three components:

Knowledge



The knowledge-based components of the course cover democratic governance, human rights, civil society and citizen engagement. Cross-cutting themes include gender equality, elections, minority rights, inclusion of and accessibility for persons with disabilities, enfranchisement, good governance, rule of law, media literacy, digital participation, diversity, the role of money in politics, youth participation, and corruption.

Interactive teaching



To strengthen students' skills (including, but not limited to, digital literacy, critical thinking and decision-making, active listening, consensus-building, public speaking, group work and problem solving), IFES' civic education methodology emphasizes the primacy of interactive teaching methodology (contrary to a traditional lecture-style format). Course professors, selected by the university, receive training on interactive teaching methods through IFES-led continuous professional development sessions with national and international experts.

Action projects



The capstone component of the course is a student action project to encourage leadership and service learning. Through a step-by-step, guided process, students identify an issue in their communities that they recognize as problematic, which they then research and relate to course topics. Ultimately, students are challenged to devise an action plan to address the issue. Through first-hand experience, students hone the knowledge, dispositions and skills necessary for active, informed citizenship.



Program Highlights and Impact:



GEORGIA

Since 2011

Democracy and Citizenship

27+ universities offering the course

11,400+ students engaged

80+ educators trained



IMPACT:

Course evaluations have demonstrated that course students and alumni experienced a positive transformation in their perceptions and understandings of the rights and roles of persons with disabilities, and minorities; applied skills developed through course experiences to academic, professional and civic endeavors; possessed a strong sense of efficacy toward their ability to affect change; were committed to the realization of the principles of democracy for all Georgians. Many alumni went on to become civil society leaders, addressing problems in their communities



and becoming champions for democracy in Georgia long after the course. With an eye to sustainability, IFES also supported the establishment of the Civic Education Lectures Association (CELA), which is a network of civic educators that represent the majority of accredited universities across the country; CELA currently maintains Georgia’s SEED curriculum. IFES has since partnered with Georgia’s Ministry of Education to expand civic education offerings to vocational education institutions.



UKRAINE

Since 2018

Democracy: from Theory to Practice

30+ universities offering the course

3,500+ students engaged

75+ educators trained



IMPACT:

Course evaluations have yielded encouraging results on all measures – course instructor interviews and surveys, student surveys and focus groups, classroom observations and pre- and post-tests. The results demonstrated that students gained knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to effectively monitor and hold the government and members of society accountable to principles of democracy in the digital age. Chief among these skills were the ability to express one’s views, listen to different perspectives, critically assess information and collaborate with others.



Beyond the knowledge and the skills developed, students also demonstrated a desire to be active citizens and a sense of efficacy that they can play a role in moving democracy forward in Ukraine. As noted by a co-founder of the Youth Democratic Association (YODA)—an organization started by course alumni to promote democratic principles and protect human rights, “Due to the course, I learned more about the work of local government, the concepts of tolerance and inclusion and refined project-based skills. But most importantly, I am no longer afraid to take the initiative and solve problems myself.”



BANGLADESH Since 2018

Democracy: from Theory to Practice

1+ university offering the course

160+ students engaged

IMPACT:

IFES' Democracy: From Theory to Practice university course gives students a theoretical background in democracy through the SEED methodology as well as practical and hands-on experience as students conduct projects and research fellowships. Over 160 students have taken part in the course to date, with the concurrent two courses being conducted online due to COVID at Dhaka University. The course has been complemented by programming through



the Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) network, which spans 12 public universities and more than 1,000 students across all divisions of Bangladesh. Additional webinars and online events, as well as campaigns for safe and inclusive campuses both offline and online, provide much needed opportunities for education and student activism at a time when universities in the country are closed.



ARMENIA Since 2020

Engaged Citizens

5+ universities offering the course

18+ educators trained

IMPACT:

IFES' Engaged Citizens course is expected to launch in 2021 at five universities throughout Armenia. In the run-up to this launch, IFES signed memorandums of understanding with



each university and has offered trainings to professors on interactive, active-learning teaching methodology as well as on Armenian statehood and its path toward democracy.

If you want to learn more about IFES' efforts to build democracy that delivers for all, visit our website: www.ifes.org

Additional Resources:

General



Civic Education for Democracy: A Q&A with Dr. Greer Burroughs:
<https://bit.ly/3l0BeNz>



A deeper dive into IFES' SEED methodology:
<https://bit.ly/3nT3vll>

Ukraine



"Democracy: from theory to practice" university course starts in Ukraine:
<https://bit.ly/35SjGit>



Evolution of the course and engagement of Ukrainian youth on democracy& human rights:
<https://bit.ly/2UTEbva>



Innovative civic education course materials introduced at universities across Ukraine:
<https://bit.ly/374plw1>



Ukrainian university educators learn new, innovative civic education methodology:
<https://bit.ly/334LluT>



Civic education course alumni unite to engage more citizens in democracy:
<https://bit.ly/35TGo9R>



A video presentation of the course in Ukraine:
<https://bit.ly/339revy>



A video of Ukrainian students and teachers sharing highlights of their experience with the course:
<https://bit.ly/3lXZpO3>

Georgia



Civic Education for youth in Georgia:
<https://bit.ly/36ZAaF1>



Local solutions for sustainable civic education at Georgian universities:
<https://bit.ly/3pW7d5c>



Civic Education Lecturers Association:
<https://bit.ly/36ZnoY2>