

Elizabeth Riley

SOCW 434

09 December 2019

### Voter Engagement Reflection

When contemplating where to present my voter engagement initiative, I felt that my alma mater, Cleveland State Community College, would be an ideal setting. I was able to set up a meeting with Professor Jana Pankey, who has a master's degree in Social Work and is the director of the Social Work Program at Cleveland State. She teaches each of the social work classes as well as oversees the Social Work Club. As a sophomore, I took her introduction to policy course. Throughout the semester, she reiterated the importance of voting and it was because of her persistence that I finally registered to vote. As a social worker and professor, she was able to inform me of the support that both she and Cleveland State initiate to encourage students to vote.

Cleveland State's honor society chapter, Phi Theta Kappa, and other student organizations, including the Social Work Club, conduct voter registration drives each semester at the Cleveland campus and the Cleveland State campus located in Athens, Tennessee. The Social Work Program at Cleveland State considers voting to be an integral part of the social work curriculum. All social work majors are required to take SOCW 2030: Introduction to Social Welfare. During this class, a significant amount of time is spent centrally focused on the importance of voter registration and involvement. This section of the course is introduced by a screening of the "Iron Jawed Angels" video to stimulate discussion about the sacrifices made to ensure all American citizens the right to vote.

Both the Social Work Program and Social Work Club encourage voter registration and assist campus organizations in promoting voter registration events. There are no known barriers in bringing voter activities to the campus of Cleveland State. Instead, there are several opportunities throughout the year for student organizations and clubs to promote voter registration and other related activities on campus. This is something that has maintained continual support and encouragement from club leaders, faculty, staff and students. Over the years, this approach has proven to be effective in engaging and informing students on the significance and impact of their individual vote as well as informing them on the importance of continuing to do so at the local, state, and federal levels.

I presented to a class of social work students and included in my presentation the link between the competencies of social work and voting. I began by drawing comparisons between competency 3: advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice. This competency requires social workers to recognize their understanding of these principles as well as observe and initiate practice that advance them. Voting is a key component in doing so. As voters, we have the ability to choose candidates who advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justices in addition to playing an active role in ensuring these candidates are placed in office.

Perhaps the clearest correlation between social work and voting is competency 5: engage in policy practice. This competency clarifies that as social workers, we are expected to recognize and engage social policy at the local, state, and federal level. Essentially, we are mandated to advocate for and participate in social policy and practices that promote the social work values of social, economic, and environmental justice. As the foundation of practice, policy is our central focus as social workers in being the primary component that impacts well-being, service

delivery, and access to social services. Voting is the first step we can take in engaging in policy practice by choosing elected officials that will ensure policies reflecting our values are implemented.

I felt that my voter engagement plan promoted and demonstrated a strong connection to the competencies of the social work profession. I illustrated professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and oral, written, and electronic communication during my initial meeting and presentation. I utilized multi-disciplinary frameworks to actively engage with a group of social work students, advancing human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice through encouraging them to vote and drawing correlations between voting and social work values. I simultaneously presented myself as a learner, recognizing the students as experts of their own experiences by actively listening to their concerns and questions regarding voting. Overall, I engaged in policy practice through discussing with students the ways in which social welfare and economic policies impact the delivery of and access of social services and the instrumental role that voting plays to ensure policies that reflect social work values are successfully put into practice.

The necessity and importance of social workers to vote is made evident through extensive review of both the social work competencies and the Code of Ethics,. The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics standard 6.02 (public participation) states that social workers should facilitate informed participation by the public in shaping social policies and institutions. Additionally, standard 6.04 (social and political action) states: Social workers should promote policies and practices that demonstrate respect for difference, support the expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, advocate for programs and institutions that demonstrate cultural

competence, and promote policies that safeguard the rights and confirm equity and social justice for all people.

Historically, social workers have had strong involvement at both the micro and macro levels of policy practice, recognizing policy as something that largely impacts our profession and, most importantly, the people that we serve each day. Therefore, it is our civic duty as citizens and social workers to remain actively engaged in the voting process; to be informed and advocate for the policies that correlate with our values and to support those within the political spectrum who uphold them.