

2025 CONFERENCE ON CIVIC STUDIES AND DEMOCRACY

**CHARACTER, AESTHETICS,
AND COMMUNITY: THE
INTERPLAY BETWEEN
COMMUNITY, ART, POLITICS,
AND CIVIC IDENTITY**

SEPTEMBER 25-27TH, 2025

L.A. Pittenger Student Center



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Center for Economic
and Civic Learning



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**

College of Fine Arts
School of Art

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25TH

Student Center Ballroom

OPENING RECEPTION

5:00–5:45 PM

A welcoming reception for conference participants, featuring light refreshments and opportunities to connect with fellow educators, artists, and civic leaders.

KEYNOTE INTRODUCTION

6:00–6:15 PM

Geoffrey Mearns (President of Ball State University) will address the importance of advancing civic dialogue through the arts and introduce the Fred Meyer Lecture and Keynote speaker Michael Greer.

FRED MEYER LECTURE ON CULTURAL POLICY & ARTS ADVOCACY

6:15–7:00 PM

Arts and Culture as Community Cohesion: The Power of the Sector Beyond the Stage and Studio

The annual Fred Meyer Lecture, led by Keynote speaker Michael Greer, will explore how the arts foster civic identity, strengthen democratic values, and build community cohesion.

AUDIENCE Q&A

7:00–7:30 PM

AWARDS CEREMONY

7:30–8:00 PM

The presentation of awards recognizing community and campus leaders whose work exemplifies civic engagement, cultural leadership, and democratic renewal.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25TH

Student Center Ballroom

AWARDS CEREMONY

LIFETIME CIVIC & ARTS CONTRIBUTION

Dr. Fred A. Meyer, Jr.

Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Ball State University

Dr. Fred A. Meyer, Jr., Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Ball State University, has spent a lifetime strengthening civic life and the arts in Muncie. As namesake of the School of Art's endowed Fred Meyer Lecture in Cultural Policy & Arts Advocacy and a longtime supporter of the David Owsley Museum of Art, Muncie Civic Theatre, and local nonprofits, Dr. Meyer has paired civic leadership with arts philanthropy to enrich the community's cultural fabric.

PUBLIC ART & CULTURAL POLICY LEADERSHIP AWARD

Tania Said, Executive Director, MuncieArts

NEIGHBORHOOD CIVIC INNOVATION AWARD

Maggie Clifton, Director of Community Engagement, City of Valparaiso

UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP LEADERSHIP AWARD

Kelli Huth, AVP for Community Engagement, Ball State University

COMMUNITY CURATION & EXHIBITION AWARD

Sebastián E. Encina, Associate Director of Curation & Exhibition, Minnetrista

CIVIC JOURNALISM MENTORSHIP AWARD

Sheryl Swingley, Journalism Educator/Emerita

CIVIC JOURNALISM LEADERSHIP AWARD

Phil Bremen, Journalist and educator (NBC News alumnus)

CIVIC LEADERSHIP & UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT

Geoffrey S. Mearns, President of Ball State University

COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

John West, Ball State University and Muncie Land Bank

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26TH

9:00-10:30 AM

CREATING SPACES FOR CIVIC CONNECTION

SC301

KELLIE KELLEY & A-TOWN CENTER PANEL

90 MIN

In this session, panelists will discuss how A-Town Center--along with Community Sing and Tea and ChogAffirm--cultivate empathy, belonging, and civic responsibility in Anderson, IN, through programs such as Artist Alley, Singer Songwriter Sessions, and Anderson Pride. Panelists will explain the evolution of this civic arts hub.

CIVIC MURALS IN AMERICA, 1910-1940: THE ITALIAN CONNECTION

SC304

40 MIN

LUCIANO CHELES

This presentation will discuss murals illustrating key events of US history and focus on leading artists who contributed to the art schemes launched by President Franklin Roosevelt during the Great Depression. Particular attention will be devoted to the murals executed in Government Departments in order to explain why many American muralists sought to imitate Italian Renaissance frescoes to produce a democratic art.

HAUNTED FUTURES: HOW ART MEDIATES NOSTALGIA & POLITICAL IDENTITY

SC304

20 MIN

SAVANNAH CALHOUN

This session will explore how art can become a critical tool in navigating in a time where modern society struggles with fractured identities, shifting political landscapes, and the erosion of the idea of the future. Drawing on the writings of Grafton Tanner and Mark Fisher, this lecture will discuss hauntological aesthetics, defined by the ghostly return of cultural memory, and how they shape civic identity through different mediums of art.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26TH

9:00-10:30 AM

BEYOND THE BROADCAST: PUBLIC MEDIA AS A HUB FOR COMMUNITY-LED ART AND SENSE OF PLACE

SC303
60 MIN

PHIL HOFFMAN (BALL STATE PUBLIC MEDIA) & BRAD SAVAGE

This session will showcase how Ball State Public Media, 91.3 The Summit, and WUWF are involved in promoting local arts and culture--not just as entertainment, but as a vital part of civic identity and community cohesion. This session will discuss how media programs like "RadioLive" or "Pop of Culture" provide a platform for local artists, reflect the region's unique aesthetics, and foster a sense of shared cultural identity and belonging; it will also examine The Summit's "330 Fest" live event and its civic impact.

10:30 AM-12:00 PM

EDUCATION AND THE CIVIL ENGAGEMENT PROBLEM

SC301
60 MIN

CHRISTOPHER HOLMQUIST

This session will answer the question of how education affects civic engagement and supply recommendations to improve systems that could better the people of the great state of Indiana. By conducting interviews with government employees, current scholarly conversation about civic engagement can be applied to Indiana.

SCHOOL CHOICE & THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC VIRTUE: INSIGHT FROM ADAM SMITH

SC301
20 MIN

NATHANAEEL SNOW

This session will explore how the arguments for and against school choice concentrate around student learning outcomes and costs of delivering instruction, as well as their role in the development of civic virtue. This presentation draws from Adam Smith's insights into the education of young people and the benefits of competition in the realm of moral education, as well as his insights into the formation of civic morality.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26TH

10:30 AM-12:00 PM

OUR DECLARATION, OUR STORY: EXPLORING THE DECLARATION'S PRINCIPLES FOR AMERICA250

SC302
60 MIN

SCOTT ALFORD

This session will evaluate America's founding promises through inquiry, in-depth analysis, and viewpoint-diverse civil discourse. As we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, this immersive session will connect historical thinking to contemporary civic life, helping students bridge past and present in meaningful, reflective ways.

SIGNALS & SOUND: CULTURAL MAPPING AT THE INTERSECTION OF MUSIC, SPORTS, AND CIVIC IDENTITY

SC303
60 MIN

JEFF FORD

This workshop-style presentation introduces Signals & Sound, a civic innovation project exploring how cultural storytelling—from neighborhood music venues to stadium fan traditions—can shape a city's sense of self and public engagement. Through an interactive mapping exercise and real-world examples from Nashville, participants will examine how cultural assets can foster belonging, reinforce character, and align with both civic priorities and grassroots identity.

12:00 PM-1:00 PM

LUNCH & KEYNOTE ADDRESS
STUDENT CENTER BALLROOM

WHAT DOES 'CIVICS' MEAN? WILLIAM JAMES AND THE CIVIC RENEWAL OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN EDUCATION

TRYGVE THRONTVEIT, PHD RESEARCH PROFESSOR IN HIGHER EDUCATION
& ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND CIVIC LEARNING

In recent years, calls for a renewed commitment to civics in American education have grown more frequent and urgent. But what's really wrong with American civics? Should civics help students know their polity, or help them know how to change it? The importance of William James' writings for everyday classroom practice are illustrated by the Third Way Civics initiative for undergraduate civic learning at Ball State University.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26TH

1:00 PM–2:30 PM

MOCK PARTICIPATION

JEREMY MERRILL

SC302

60 MIN

This interactive workshop explores how civic identity, community aesthetics, and democratic life play out in the creation of parks in the United States. Participants will learn about the historical evolution of American parks and then engage in a hands-on design exercise, collaborating in small groups to create a fictional park within the Muncie community. Drawing on methods used by landscape architects—including stakeholder mapping, visioning exercises, and participatory design strategies—participants will explore how public spaces can reflect shared values, accommodate diverse needs, and strengthen civic character.

POLITICS AND THE EVERYDAY IN “MIDDLETOWN”

JAMES CONNOLLY & PATRICK COLLIER

SC303

60 MIN

This lecture introduces the Everyday Life in Middletown (EDLM) project, a collaborative, community-based creative project. The presentation considers how and when political engagement figures in the everyday lives these writers describe. Attendees will learn about the idea of political hobbyism, as well as the impact of the rise of social media use and the decline of the local press on feelings about politics and civic engagement.

LATERAL READING AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: TOOLS FOR CIVIC AWARENESS

*DR. LUIZ OROZCO & STUDENTS: EDEN HATHAWAY, PRINCE DANQUAH,
OGHENEMARHO KARIEREN, MIUSTAPHA SEIDU, EBUKA MMADUEKWE*

SC304

60 MIN

This session will equip community members with practical skills to identify misinformation through lateral reading, a fact-checking method that involves consulting external sources. We introduce a simple framework and demonstrate how AI tools like ChatGPT and browser extensions can support real-time verification. Participants will receive a handout to share these practices in civic spaces. The goal is to decrease polarization caused by controversial news and promote digital responsibility and informed civic engagement.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26TH

2:30-4:00 PM

BUILD COMMUNITIES THAT COMMUNICATE: USING THE SECRETS OF OPERA SINGERS!

**SC301
40 MIN**

ANNE FUCHS

This session will emphasize that strong communication skills are critical in today's civic and business spheres, and the most important messaging tool is voice. Through interaction, large groups, and pairs, attendees will learn the time-honored skills of opera singers and how to apply these skills to hone communication in civic engagement.

COUNTRY RECKONINGS: THEATER, ENVIRONMENTAL DEMOCRACY, AND CIVIC IMAGINATION IN CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI

**SC301
40 MIN**

THERON WILKERSON

This session will introduce Country Reckonings, a rural arts and civic engagement initiative in Mississippi and Alabama. This project foregrounds performance as a method of political memory and character formation in Black, Afro-Indigenous, and Latinx communities. This session bridges the gap between civic knowledge, character formation, and real-world engagement through the lens of rural public humanities.

FROM CONFLICT TO CONNECTION: WORKING TOGETHER IN DIVIDED COMMUNITIES

**SC302
60 MIN**

LULU FRIESDAT

This session will provide attendees with background on the presenter's personal journey in civic engagement. Further, this session will focus on the method that allows a successful transpartisan coalition to take hold and grow, as well as how individuals can personalize this journey and develop an individualized roadmap for transpartisan success.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26TH

2:30–4:00 PM

“IKKE BARE ALDRI MER”: PROMISE, GRIEF, AND A FULBRIGHT IN NORWAY

**SC304
40 MIN**

JEFF SPANKE

This interactive presentation explores specifically the complex roles that art plays as a coping mechanism for communal grief, as well as the diverse and multimodal ways it serves restorative, justice-oriented ends and as a means of promoting sustained cultural memory. This session will also emphasize how an arts-based approach to citizenship education can lead students to cultivate a progressive sense of critical, civic literacy.

CULTIVATING CIVIC VIRTUE IN THE CLASSROOM

**SC304
30 MIN**

EMILEE MCHORNEY

This interactive professional development session equips teachers with strategies to intentionally weave together civic education and character formation. Participants will explore primary sources, historical case studies, and classroom practices that highlight essential civic virtues—such as responsibility, courage, civility, and justice—that sustain American democracy.

PANEL DISCUSSION: LOCAL LAND USE & EFFECTIVE CIVIC PARTICIPATION

**SC302
40 MIN**

JOHN WEST, NATE HOWARD, ZACH GULLION, & BRAD KING

A panel on the importance of clear, useable information for effective civic participation. The Muncie Land Bank and its goals can help people to understand the mechanisms that result in blight and abandonment. In addition, this panel will share the consequences of different methods for addressing property abandonment, such as lien sales versus land banking.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27TH

9:00 AM-12:00 PM

CREATIVE CARTOGRAPHY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR THE CIVICS CLASSROOM

SC301
9 AM-10 AM

MELISSA GENTRY

This session explores how maps can become civic texts that connect students to their communities. The presentation will demonstrate to attendees how cartography and storytelling foster place-based learning, empathy, and active citizenship in the civics classroom. Educators and students alike will benefit from learning about cartography.

WELCOME TO WHITELY-OPOLY: WHERE EVERY ROLL TELLS A STORY

SC301
10 AM-11 AM

JORN SEEMANN

Board games can serve as powerful educational tools to teach about the history and culture of a community. This session is about a Monopoly-style game designed for the Whitely Community in Muncie to teach about the neighborhood's past, people, and places. After a brief introduction to the projects, participants will have the opportunity to play and discuss the game.

BEYOND CIVICS LESSONS TO UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNITY: ESSENTIALS FOR A DEMOCRATIC LIFE

SC301
11 AM-12 PM

LINDA HANSON (LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS)

Indiana's abysmal voter turnout compels us to look closely at our elections, not just at the results but at the procedures and the laws surrounding Hoosiers' right to vote. Launching from the Citizens Handbook developed by the League of Women Voters of Indiana, we will explore the details of how elections function in Indiana--and why primary elections are crucial to maintaining and strengthening community.