

Script for NFOA Bridge Mini Bodcast Featuring Community Partner Anita Austin from Loud Light

Bumper music lead in...

KB: Welcome to this 10-minute episode of the NFOA Bridge mini bodcast. N-F-O-A is the acronym for Not for Ourselves Alone, Washburn's motto. And the virtual bridge is located right here on Teaching Tuesdays, connecting Washburn with the Topeka community and beyond through community-engaged learning also known as CEL.

I'm Karen Barron, Community-Engaged Learning Coordinator for the Center for Teaching Excellence and Learning and host of this series. Today, our featured guest is Program Director of Loud Light, Anita Austin. Welcome, Anita; thank you for being here.

AA:: Hi, thanks for having me, Karen.

Great; we're glad you're here. First, could you please just give us a brief overview of what Loud Light is, you know your overall goals and mission.

AA: Yeah, so Loud Light is a civic engagement voter rights organization. We're a non-profit and our mission is getting people more engaged in Kansas politics to create a more representative democracy. And, I mean I can definitely elaborate on that a little bit more. But, so, we do different things. A big part of our work is creating digestible information so that people are able to find out and learn about what is going on in state government, and we also host internship programs, which is where my work comes in, and we run programs all throughout the year focused on civic engagement and partnering with universities in the state to have their students in those programs.

KB: Great, yeah, thank you. I did kind of want a little bit more of an overview of what all you do and the scope of what you do. So, I know because we've talked a little bit before that you, your focus for the different semesters changes as the year and the seasons change. And so, I'd like it if you could just talk a little more about that when you're talk about you know the fall. Around here we talk about semesters, so the fall semester and the spring semester and maybe the summer semester. Could you talk about maybe your focus at those different times?

AA: Absolutely. We run our programs in semesters as well, so I'm used to that language. In the fall, we're always focused on get out the vote work. Every fall, there's an election in Kansas so we're typically training students how to do voter registration, how to talk about voter advocacy, and how to do get out the vote work, and so we host a paid internship every fall where we have different students from around from colleges around the state participate and do that work. In the spring semester, we move into focus on the legislative session. Every spring the Kansas legislature is in session from January all the way till like the first week of May. It fits in perfectly with the spring semester, so we have students with us to, in our virtual programs to learn about the session. It's really kind of a unique experience and the only thing like it in

Kansas because although you can go up to the capitol to do legislative internships like hosted by the legislature, ours is the only program where you can learn virtually about everything that's going on in the capitol, and so we're running that spring program right now, and it's really awesome. And then in the summer, we also host a summer program, but we focus on community organizing. And that's really about, that's really more of a learning experience for students. It's not one of our paid programs. It's actually kind of like a free learning opportunity for students where we teach them how they can get engaged and involved to do the work they want to do in their own communities and how to advocate on issues they care about in their local communities. So that kind of summarizes a year of work and programs at Loud Light, at least from the slice of the pie that I operate with our programming work.

KB: Okay. So like, just for example, for this spring semester and the virtual learning, do you, is there a cap on that, can only so many students participate in that, the virtual learning, or is it open, or how does that work?

AA: We usually aim for 15-20 students for the spring program and that's because we do want to be able to give like individualized learning. I guess we could open it to an unlimited amount, but I guess I take a lot of pride in like connecting with these students and making sure they're really learning in a way that they not only heard it but can redeliver that information and teach it to others, and so we do limit the program to between 15 and 20 in the spring.

KB: Okay; all right, well, thanks. I just needed a little clarification on that myself, and so I know you've worked over the years with a number of individual students; have you ever worked with a class? A Washburn class?

Not a class as a whole in terms of having the students all volunteer. I have come to speak to Washburn classes because I mean one of my favorite things to talk about is like the importance of youth advocacy in the state, you know. Kansas has a very young population. There's just a lot of young people in the state. They make up a pretty big demographic, but they don't vote and therefore a lot of the things that are crucial to young people right, like tuition rates or like healthcare, or marijuana reform, or like issues that young people are concerned with; they often don't hear their concerns addressed because they're such an inactive population. So I have come before to talk in more detail about those things and speak with classes at Washburn and at other colleges. But as far as like volunteer and engagement activities, we always have those available even outside of our like regularly scheduled programming for lack of a better term, but there's opportunities to like to reach out and volunteer with Loud Light.

KB: Okay, great, Well I think what caught my attention was when you were speaking about that usually you have about 15-20 students say in the program you're doing right now, I thought oh, my classes in the English Department are capped at 22 and I thought that'd be the perfect size. So that's what went through my mind on that. So, so I guess now, one of my main questions and one of my reasons for doing this series of podcasts, is that we just spent so much time trying to adjust to the pandemic climate we've been in and hopefully we are emerging from that now. I just wonder if you have a vision for maybe future partnerships with Washburn. And

not only with maybe students but possibly with faculty or staff. Do you have ideas about, you know, what you would hope a partnership could look like?

AA: Yeah, so when, when I think of partnerships with admin or with Washburn, I think of ways that we can run engagement events together, like I've worked with the union before to do get out the vote events, to give away free pizza or coffee like around election season, but I've also worked with admin, like I mentioned earlier, just to come and speak to their class, to let them know the opportunities that Loud Light has, just to be like a resource like if anyone is interested in a recap of the session or kind of a summary of what's going on in the legislature or what's currently going on in Kansas politics, I'm always available to kind of provide that. But moving forward, when I think about partnering, I know I want to form good relationships so that admin are noticing students that are passionate about this work and are connecting them to Loud Light. And that we are like enhancing each other's work kind of by forming that relationship.

Right, the reciprocity of, of you know the campus and the community, and you know just the blurred lines of it because we are really you know one large community. So yeah, I appreciate what you are trying to and the involvement and engagement that you offer to students, and you know I still am rooting for a polling site on the campus someday, and I know that that has been part of your mission and so hopefully that will come to fruition one of these days. So, Anita, it's been a real pleasure speaking to you and we look forward to partnering with you.

For more information on this bodcast, or how you can get involved with Community-Engaged Learning at Washburn, please see the CEL Pillar on the Center for Teaching Excellence webpage, and contact me, Karen Barron, Coordinator of CEL for CTEL.

And a shout out to Tom Morgan for composing our bumper music and the Washburn jazz band for recording it, featuring Craig Treinen on sax, Thanks! See you next week on the NFOA bridge.

Bumper music fade out