Describe the problem or needs of society you want to address when you enter public service. (If possible, use statistical data to define the magnitude of the problem.)

"Rock the Vote" and registration drives increase civic engagement among youth -- voter turnout of ages 18-24 in 2008 was the second-highest age category at 48% -- but revitalizing higher education programs would further increase political participation. Education is a notable factor in voter turnout, but a study by D. Sunshine Hillygus (2005) stressed that content makes the difference in political participation. Social science college curricula, including courses in political science, sociology, history, economics, and anthropology, have a positive and significant effect on political participation: social science graduates were found to be among the most politically active compared to those in other programs (38% compared to 34%). LSU established an interdisciplinary communications program, Communication across the Curriculum (CxC), which integrates written and verbal skills into all degree programs. It offers an array of "communication-intensive" courses emphasizing writing, speaking, visual and technological aspects, and challenges students to think critically.

Schools under the Southern Regional Education Board should incorporate LSU's CxC as part of the current general education requirements. As a result, students will be more politically engaged after graduating; they will have the skills to participate in the political process, become politically educated and motivated to vote.

Policy Proposal Information

To:
Mr. Jeff Gagne
Office Held:
Director, Education Policies, Southern Regional Education Board
Issue:
Requirements for General Education credits involving more social science courses

Problem Statement: *(1700 Character or 200 Word limit)*

In 2010, just 28.2% of 18-24 year olds with some college experience participated in the midterm elections, continuing a downward trend from just 35.3% in 1974.[1] This lack of civic engagement among the apathetic youth has long been a concern for scholars, politicians,and civic leaders. To reinvigorate the youth vote, and reverse the trend, we need to soberly consider the substantive obstacles between young citizens and the polling booths. One such obstacle, outlined by social science researcher D.Sunshine Hillygus, strongly suggests that students with an inadequate understanding of the social sciences are the least politically engaged. Most public, four-year universities lack a program that integrates communication-intensive courses into all degree programs as part of their general education requirements. Regardless of the quality of university being attended, Hillygus shows students who don't receive an education in verbal and communication skills are less likely to be politically motivated.

Hillygus's research indicates that by integrating social sciences into the curricula of higher education programs, universities increase the verbal and communication skills of their students and thus increase their level of voter participation. Her research has shown that students with high verbal aptitude were more likely to vote than those with lower verbal aptitude, and that improving these skills through an expanded social science and communications curriculum directly results in statistically significant greater voter turnout. Our challenge now is to provide, via the Southern Regional Education Board, the proper curricula, programs and environment in higher education that will foster increases in voter participation. As Thomas Jefferson said in 1805: "Such a degree of learning [should be] given to every member of the society as will enable him to read, to judge, and to vote understandingly on what is passing."

Proposed Solution:

SREB schools should re-evaluate the content of general education requirements within their four-year public universities. A program similar to LSU's Communication across the Curriculum (CxC) should be implemented in universities across the South. This program strives to integrate communication-intensive courses in all degree programs (www.cxc.lsu.edu). If this program was integrated into general education requirements in all degree programs, more students would receive a well-rounded curriculum challenging them to perfect their communication skills.

Because not all students study in the social sciences, it is unfeasible for everyone to fill their course schedules with an extensive repertoire of social science and communications credits. The CxC therefore fills a peculiar niche in the education of all students, allowing them the flexibility to remain in their chosen fields while also acquiring vital skills that will make them better citizens. By institutionalizing such a program, LSU has been able to incentivize students to take these credits by giving the students a framework within which they can work. Programs like the CxC could help enrich not only the educations of college students, but also strengthen our democracy with anew influx of intelligent, motivated and engaged citizens.

Major Obstacles/Implementation Challenges [Do not discuss how your proposal overcomes these challenges]:

Recent nationwide budget cuts to higher education programs have universities across the South making tough decisions about which programs to keep or to cut. As a result, many degree programs focused on languages or social sciences have been lacking in resources to strengthen course content. These budget cuts are impairing schools from implementing new programs, but this makes finding communications programs that ultimately result in a greater increase of civic engagement all the more important.

I attest that the proposal outlined here is the result of my own thought and work.
References, Footnotes, and Exhibits

[1]http://www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/

Hillygus, D. Sunshine. "The Missing Link: Exploring the Relationship Between Higher Education and Political Engagement." *Political Behavior* 27.1 (2005): 25-46.*Duke.edu*. Duke University. Web. 5 Jan. 2012. <http://www.duke.edu/~hillygus/documents/HillygusPB.pdf>.

"Thomas Jefferson on Educating the People" *Tcfir.org*. Ed. Reid Cornwell. The Center for Internet Research (TCFIR). Web. 4 Feb. 2012. <http://tcfir.org/opinion/Thomas%20Jefferson%20on%20Educating%20the%20People.pdf>.