# Civic Engagement at AUBG

AUBG is expanding its commitment to civic engagement by introducing new curriculum elements and community-driven initiatives across disciplines. Led by the Center for Information, Democracy, and Citizenship (CIDC) and the Dean of Students Office, these efforts include academic projects, skill-building workshops, and hands-on experiences. Through these opportunities, students develop essential civic skills and gain a broader understanding of community engagement on both local and global levels.

## **Community-Oriented Academic Initiatives**

AUBG integrates civic engagement into its curriculum through various projects that link academic knowledge with real-world social impact. The Civic Engagement Fund, supported by OSUN, enabled AUBG to support community-oriented senior projects, such as documentary filmmaking and cross-cultural journalism, and small group initiatives like math competitions, debate events, and media festivals. Students are encouraged to pursue capstone projects that address social issues, building a bridge between academic learning and civic action. This approach strengthens students' skills in research, critical thinking, and public engagement.

## **Student-Led Projects and Internships**

With the support of OSUN's Civic Engagement Initiative, students are empowered to lead their own community-based projects or participate in internships with civil society organizations. Projects funded through small grants range from mental health support platforms to public speaking workshops and cultural exhibitions, each offering unique opportunities for students to connect with and impact their communities. Additionally, internships provide students with practical experience in civic education, social entrepreneurship, and STEM advocacy, allowing them to engage directly with societal challenges while gaining valuable career skills.

## **Expanding Civic Engagement Opportunities**

To further support the integration of civic engagement within its academic programs, AUBG regularly collaborates with faculty and external partners to develop new initiatives. For instance, the Educational Summer Camp on Leadership and Civic Engagement introduces high school students to topics such as social entrepreneurship, sustainability, and creative industries, fostering early exposure to civic responsibility. Panel discussions, workshops, and international conferences—such as the OSUN ‘Get Engaged’ Student Action and Youth Leadership Conference—offer AUBG students a platform to network with civic-minded peers globally and participate in leadership development.

## **The Center for Information, Democracy and Citizenship at AUBG**

Founded in 2022, the Center for Information, Democracy, and Citizenship (CIDC) at AUBG addresses critical challenges at the intersection of information, democracy, and citizenship. As a hub of transdisciplinary research, education, and public engagement, the CIDC is dedicated to empowering individuals and communities to navigate the complexities of the digital age with confidence and critical acumen. Through pioneering initiatives, the CIDC aims to cultivate a global society resilient against dis/misinformation and various other emerging threats to democracy. The CIDC serves as a dynamic instrument for advancing AUBG’s mission, embodying the university's commitment to democracy.

The CIDC has five programmatic focal areas (see diagram below). CIDC projects are designed and implemented within each area to achieve the center’s mission.

CIDC Programmatic Focal Areas and Projects 2024/25

### Cognitive Security and Countering Malign Influence Operations

A cornerstone of the CIDC’s work in this focal area is the *CIDC-Sensika Disinformation Observatory*. A new partnership initiative with Sensika (a media monitoring firm based in Sofia, Bulgaria), the Observatory monitors, tracks, and tags malign narratives across the Balkans, providing invaluable insights into the dynamics of information warfare in the region and Western Europe. AUBG students contribute to the platform as junior analysts.

Complementing the Observatory, the CIDC partners with the Poynter Institute to implement the *Be MediaWise Bulgaria* project which tackles the urgent need for media literacy among young people in Bulgaria. Implemented in partnership with the Journalism and Mass Communication department at AUBG, this initiative equips AUBG students with the tools and knowledge to promote media literacy across Bulgaria.

### Democratic Citizenship and Engagement

The *Platform for Youth Dialogue and Participation*, implemented with funding from the German Marshall Fund addresses the challenge of youth disengagement from political processes. University students are trained to mentor high schoolers to develop innovative peer-to-peer approaches to civic participation.

The CIDC also implements the project, *You(TH) Participate: Innovating Civic Engagement in Bulgaria Through Deliberative Democracy* with funding from the US Embassy in Sofia. The goal of this project is to educate university-level students from Bulgaria on deliberative democracy. Students are trained and empowered to organize a youth assembly in Bulgaria. With additional funding from Heinrich Böll Stiftung, the project involves the transborder participation of students from Greece.

### Factual Media Advocacy

This programmatic focal area at the CIDC recognizes the pivotal role of factual media in democracy and civic participation. The *English for Journalists*program enhances the capabilities of Bulgarian media professionals. Funded by the US Embassy in Sofia, this initiative is a collaboration between the CIDC and the English Language Institute at AUBG.

Another program in this focal area is the *Christo Grozev Fellowship for Courageous Journalism.* Named after the globally renowned investigative journalist and AUBG alum, Christo Grozev, this fellowship provides early to mid-career journalists with training, mentorship, and support to undertake significant investigative projects that uphold democracy, counter disinformation, and promote human rights and accountable governance, particularly in societies where democracy is under stress.

Complementing the Grozev Fellowship is the *Bulgaria International Journalism Fellowship* program funded by the America for Bulgaria Foundation. The fellowship mentors experienced Bulgarian journalists to produce in-depth, accountability-focused stories that shed light on Bulgaria's democratic journey to the international community.

### Transdisciplinary Research and Education

Sponsored by People Powered, the *AI Aware Universities* project seeks to create an inclusive strategy for the ethical use of AI in academic settings. Using participatory policymaking and citizens’ assemblies, the project engages university stakeholders in critical deliberations on harnessing AI's potential while safeguarding academic integrity. Implemented in collaboration with five partner universities in Europe, this project aims to set a benchmark for responsible AI use in higher education, promoting ethical standards and digital literacy. Another project in this focal area, the EU-funded *Integration in Local Communities* project addresses the pressing global issue of migrant integration. By creating multi-stakeholder engagement models, this initiative promotes inclusive societies and effective migration management.

### Enhanced Support for Student and Faculty-led Initiatives

The *Democracy Project (DemPro)* is a bespoke digital platform currently in development at the CIDC. It aims to enhance democratic engagement among students at the AUBG and young individuals across Bulgaria and Eastern Europe. The project is privately funded by Julia Watkins. Completed civic and community engagement projects and “how-to” guides will be contributed to the DemPro platform.

In addition to these initiatives, the *Civic and Community Engagement Fund* at AUBG supports a variety of student-led projects, community-oriented capstone projects, internships, and co-curricular activities. Programs such as the Educational Summer Camp on Leadership and Civic Engagement introduce high school students to themes like social entrepreneurship, sustainability, and creative industries, nurturing a new generation of engaged citizens. By integrating civic engagement into its curriculum and activities, AUBG prepares students to address societal challenges with creativity and compassion.

## **Celebrating AUBG’s Impactful Alumni**

With a network of over 6,000 alumni, AUBG takes pride in the positive impact its graduates make worldwide. This diverse alumni community unites in its commitment to advancing democracy, innovation, and social responsibility. CIDC’s initiatives, supported by partnerships and funding from global organizations, continue to inspire current students and alumni alike to uphold the values of equity, integrity, and active citizenship.