With a strong belief in the writings and history of the Founding Fathers and a growing concern for the well-being of our government and political systems, Jim Ryan wanted the CCL to serve as an example of a nonpartisan, neutral and open body dedicated to civil discourse, while promoting government transparency, accountability and an improved political culture in Illinois.

Benedictine University’s Center for Civic Leadership (CCL) celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2015. Throughout the course of this decade, the CCL has played an active role in local, state and national politics, offering numerous events and programs to Benedictine University students, faculty, staff and the community at large. These have included a regular speaker series with an annual spring keynote address, candidate debates and forums, the fall Jim Ryan Symposium, panel discussions, student small group activities, internships and interactive simulations as part of our annual Youth Government Day conference. The CCL’s founder, former Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan, C68, sought to establish an organization that would promote democratic values in DuPage County and the surrounding area.

While aiming for these goals, the CCL continues to work toward better models of campaigning, policymaking and governance in the Land of Lincoln, encouraging young people to be more involved as their generation’s leaders of the future. Our programs and events capture the essence of our democratic values and the importance of hearing from a broad range of voices. Benedictine students are invited to participate firsthand in these activities as volunteers and as University diplomats for our various guests.

I hope you will join us in continuing this conversation about civics and public life, and in promoting an interest in the programs and events that directly relate to our community, our state, and our nation.

– Phillip Hardy, Ph.D.
The nonpartisan, nonprofit Center for Civic Leadership (CCL) at Benedictine University seeks to be an exemplar institution that promotes civic engagement, public service, public education and civic leadership in Illinois. The CCL promotes bipartisanship and respectful discourse covering the pressing issues and challenges facing local governments in Illinois, our state leadership in Springfield and our national leaders in Washington, D.C.

1) Encourage young people to become involved and pursue opportunities in government as the “next generation of civic leaders” in Illinois.

2) Promote the values of bipartisanship and civil debate.

3) Work with policymakers to find solutions to the many challenges we face across all levels of government.

4) Cultivate a better, healthier political culture in Illinois.
Jim Ryan dedicated decades of his professional life to public service and promoting civic values in Illinois. A respected Catholic leader and proud resident of Illinois, Ryan's patriotism and commitment to community are unmatched. His service to the state included eight years as Illinois attorney general, 10 years in the DuPage County State’s Attorney Office as lead prosecutor, and two bids for governor in 2002 and 2010.

In partnership with the Benedictine University Board of Trustees and the Political Science faculty, Ryan established the Center for Civic Leadership (CCL) at the University in 2005 and played a pivotal role in offering programs, internships, conferences and a regular speaker series that was, and continues to be, free and open to the general public. The CCL was established to promote the values of leadership, service, and public education in Illinois, and to transform the state’s political culture from one associated with corruption and graft to one that could be seen as an exemplar around the country.

As the CCL’s Distinguished Fellow, Ryan also taught Political Science and Criminal Justice courses. He emphasized core American values, the importance of ethics and morality in everyday life, and the inspirational story of the founding of the United States.
Celebrating Illinois’ Legacy of Presidential Leadership

“The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people, whatever they need to have done, but cannot do at all, or cannot so well do, for themselves in their separate and individual capacities.”
– Abraham Lincoln

“In a world wracked by hatred, economic crisis, and political tension, America remains mankind’s best hope.”
– Ronald Reagan

“You have been tested and tempered by events that your parents and I never imagined we’d see when we sat where you sit. And yet, despite all this, or more likely because of it, yours has become a generation possessed with that most American of ideas – that people who love their country can change it.”
– Barack Obama

“I was thrilled to be asked to speak to the students at Benedictine University regarding the Supreme Court of Illinois and its Constitutional function as it impacts not only the students’ lives, but the lives of all of our state’s citizens. I’d like to thank the staff at Benedictine for all their hard work in raising awareness and encouraging involvement in politics and public service for all citizens, especially our youth. Benedictine staff and students are fortunate to have former Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan as the founder of the Center for Civic Leadership.”
– Anne Burke
Illinois Supreme Court justice

Linda Chapa LaVia
state Rep., (D-Aurora)

Michael Connelly
state Sen., (R-Wheaton)

Patrick Fitzgerald,
former U.S. attorney

Lisa Madigan
Illinois attorney general
Every spring, the CCL’s Youth Government Conference provides an opportunity for high school teachers to engage their students on pressing topics of local, state or national concern with panel discussions from high-profile political figures and other experts who are engaged in the issues at hand. The event is free of charge to teachers and students.

Each conference focuses on a specific topic or theme, which allows students to engage in discussion with expert panelists on a variety of key issues and learn through interactive hands-on simulations.

**Conference topics have included:**

- Domestic violence
- Corruption and mismanagement in Illinois
- The Affordable Care Act and health care reform
- Criminal justice reform
- Grassroots political mobilization and protest politics
- Terror threats and government crisis response
- The economic challenges of living below the poverty line
Anthony Altimari, M.D., speaks to an audience of high school students at the 2014 Youth Government Day conference. Altimari, a private practice surgeon, discussed the challenges of managing a busy practice, the consequences of policy changes regarding billing and medical expenses under the Affordable Care Act, and his own views about health care reform in the United States.

Finding Solutions, Advocating Better Public Policies

“The CCL is doing vital work in Illinois. Illinoisans of all ages must learn to be active and engaged citizens who monitor the efforts of the elected officials who work for us, day in and day out. Reboot Illinois joins the CCL in the commitment to seeding and spreading that message in order to grow an improved Illinois.”

– Madeleine Doubek
chief operating officer for Reboot Illinois

Promoting Democracy and Civic Engagement
“My time as a Center for Civic Leadership Public Service Fellow was one of the highlights of my time at the University. Serving as a Fellow allowed me to increase my leadership ability and interact with keynote speakers. More importantly, it gave me a chance to help increase civic involvement in the communities surrounding Lisle, especially through Youth Government Day. I thoroughly enjoyed my time as a Fellow, and I am grateful for having been given the opportunity to serve.”

– Qyle Iftikhar, C15, Political Science

“The CCL helped reinforce the concept of teamwork, the importance of community involvement and the value of education for the continued growth of a healthy society. As a Public Service Fellow, I worked with individuals with different worldviews, attitudes and backgrounds, which made everyone within the CCL better and more well-rounded in all aspects of our lives. Today, as an elected member of the Joliet Township High School District 204 Board of Education, I represent one of the most diverse communities in the state of Illinois. My experience with the CCL has taught me to examine every issue that I face through the eyes of every constituent that I represent.”

– Tyler Marcum, C13, Political Science

Pictured above (left to right): Mahira Musani, Malak Issa, Sam Ortega-Guerrero, Paulina Piasecki and Yara Rashad.
The annual Model Illinois Government (MIG) simulation, held in the Capitol Complex in Springfield each February, welcomes students from across the state to participate in a mock process of writing, amending and debating legislation, holding moot court simulations, and allowing interested students to create state budgets so they can get a better sense of revenue challenges associated with policymaking.

Benedictine’s MIG delegation began 10 years ago. As model state representatives and senators, students work at the very desks of the state’s legislative leaders, and debate bills in the wells of the Senate and House.
Undergraduates Gain Firsthand Experience in Government and Politics

Internships

“My involvement with state Sen. Linda Holmes (D-Aurora) started in 2014. I was an intern for the fall semester and eventually was hired as a part-time employee in the senator’s district office. I help with constituent casework. If any constituent has a problem, needs advice or has concerns with any bills being debated in Springfield, it is my responsibility to help resolve the situation as best as possible. I have also helped plan and execute events which provide resources and information to people who live in the district and attend various other functions. This shows support for current and new businesses and organizations, and allows for myself and the senator to become more familiar with the desires and needs of the people.

Being a Public Service Fellow has given me the tools and experience necessary to perform these tasks successfully.”

– Junelly Gonzalez, Political Science

“The CCL allowed me to sculpt my values while encouraging me to get involved in government. I first became involved as a volunteer for the re-election campaign of former U.S. Rep. Judy Biggert (R-III.), which opened the door to many other opportunities for me in Republican politics.

The CCL influenced me to become more attentive in my own community both in my hometown of Downers Grove and at Benedictine. I joined my local Republican organization and became a precinct committeeman, and I worked with others at Benedictine to re-establish the College Republicans on campus. The CCL also gave me the opportunity to network within the Lisle-Naperville area and I was able to intern for state Sen. Michael Connelly (R-Wheaton). During the 2014 gubernatorial general election, I was offered a position to run field operations for the Rauner for Governor campaign in northwest suburban Cook County. Following his victory in November, I served as a staff supervisor on Bruce Rauner’s Education Policy Transition Team. I currently work at the Department of Revenue and Illinois Liquor Control Commission. My life has truly been positively affected by the opportunities given to me through the CCL and Benedictine.”

– Derek Murphy, C14, Political Science

“The CCL allowed me to see the behind-the-scenes preparation that goes into official events. I assisted with the logistics of vice presidential events and worked directly with executive office staff and other agencies to ensure safe and efficient travel.

Being a member of the White House Internship Program was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to commence a career in public service alongside other devoted young leaders. The foundations I learned from Benedictine, including the scope and responsibilities of the federal government, prepared me well for this experience and encouraged me to succeed after setting the highest of goals.

A very special ‘thank you’ to the faculty and staff of the Department of Political Science for their continued support throughout this exciting journey. Without their help, none of this would have been possible.”

– Steve Montalto, J.D., C11 Social Science

President for Joe Biden allowed
Working as an intern in the Office of the Vice President for Joe Biden allowed me to see the behind-the-scenes preparation that goes into official events. I assisted with the logistics of vice presidential events and worked directly with executive office staff and other agencies to ensure safe and efficient travel.

Being a member of the White House Internship Program was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to commence a career in public service alongside other devoted young leaders. The foundations I learned from Benedictine, including the scope and responsibilities of the federal government, prepared me well for this experience and encouraged me to succeed after setting the highest of goals.

A very special ‘thank you’ to the faculty and staff of the Department of Political Science for their continued support throughout this exciting journey. Without their help, none of this would have been possible.

– Steve Montalto, J.D., C11

Election Judge Training

Working with the DuPage County Election Commission, the CCL and Department of Political Science have trained and employed hundreds of Benedictine students as local election judges.

Students who participate in this program fill critical positions at numerous polling places throughout the county.

Election judges are paid to assist in setting up and running polling centers on election day which includes assisting voters with electronic and paper voting procedures, tallying final vote counts and ensuring that the overall process runs smoothly.

This partnership began after Benedictine was awarded several thousand dollars in grant funding from the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002.
Public Forums and Symposia

A commitment to discourse and community education. Bringing the pressing issues of the day to the forefront. Past events include:

Civil Rights Act of 1964 – a 50th Anniversary Reflection Event

The CCL invited several inspiring speakers as part of “The Civil Rights Act of 1964: Past, Present and Future,” to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the landmark legislation in October 2014. The event featured Rev. F. Willis Johnson, D.Min., pastor of Wellspring Church and one of the key community members involved in organizing nonviolent protests in Ferguson, Mo., following the police shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown.

Johnson was joined by two civil rights activists – John Marks, one of the first black students to integrate Florida State University in 1965 and former longtime mayor of Tallahassee, Fla., and Fannie Rushing, Ph.D., a founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Chicago and current professor of History at Benedictine.

Hate Crimes Symposium

Sadia Covert, J.D., C05, Political Science, a private practice attorney and community activist, organized and moderated the Hate Crime Awareness Symposium in March 2015 at Benedictine.

The event’s purpose was to encourage dialogue and engage the community on the silent and growing problem of hate and bigotry. In addition to many BenU students, faculty and staff, the audience also included Lisle Mayor Joe Broda, local deputy chiefs of police, members of the Naperville City Council, and representatives from the offices of U.S. Rep. Bill Foster (D-Ill.) and Governor Bruce Rauner. Panelists spoke about the impact of hate crimes on various target groups, law enforcement procedures involved in investigating hate crimes and the challenges associated with prosecuting these offenses.

The panel included FBI Special Agent Vick Lombardo, Rabbi Marc Rudolph of the Congregation Beth Shalom, Rabya Khan, staff attorney for the Council on American Islamic Relations, The Sikh Coalition, and the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago.
“I can pinpoint my experience attending the 2012 Iowa caucuses as a launching pad for my career. My time spent in Iowa made me uniquely qualified for an internship that turned into a full-time position with Lisa Wagner and Associates, one of the most respected campaign fundraising and event planning organizations in the country. The trip gave me a glimpse of the many different ways one can pursue a career in politics from working for state party organizations all the way up to campaign management and in national media.”

– Meaghan Olsen, C13, Communication Arts
“The CCL Speaker Series

“The CCL at Benedictine delivers on exactly what seems to have become so rare everywhere else in the world — nonpartisan, respectful debate and discussion focused on policy issues. People debate ideas and get informed without trying to destroy one another. I guess it’s ‘old school’ in that way.”

– Austan Goolsbee
professor of Economics at the University of Chicago and former economic adviser to President Barack Obama

“Paul Rusesabagina (pictured left) had a lasting impact on our students and on our campus. His appearance, and in particular his personal interactions with our students which he continued after his visit, inspired the creation of a Benedictine chapter of STAND, a global anti-genocide organization. For several years, that chapter was named the most active in the Midwest and several members remained actively involved in the issue after graduation by participating in events and staying in touch with the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation.”

– Joel Ostrow, Ph.D., professor of Political Science
» Marian Wright Edelman, Children’s Defense Fund founder and president

» David Broder, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for *The Washington Post*

» Michelle Alexander, legal scholar, activist and author of the critically acclaimed “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness”

» Peter Bergen, CNN’s national security analyst

» Alberto Gonzales, former U.S. attorney general

» Bob Woodward, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for *The Washington Post*
Fr. Michael Pfleger (far left) delivered an impassioned speech on the plague of gun violence and inner-city poverty in Chicago. More than 600 people packed the Krasa Student Center to hear his talk.

“Visiting Benedictine University was not what I expected it to be. The crowd was not there just to listen, but to engage. I spent time with the students letting them ask questions and then spoke to a large crowd of students and the community. They listened, but they were not passive. They engaged in questions and had what is more and more rare these days — actual community and conversation. It was a terrific experience.”

– Erick-Woods Erickson
TheResurgent.com founder and FOX News Contributor

“Benedictine University should be proud of the great work the CCL is doing to advance the principles of civic involvement, nonpartisanship and youth engagement. I had a great experience speaking to a packed house about health care reform and spent some time earlier in the day engaged with several hundred high school students. The Youth Government Day conference is a remarkable tool for youth outreach. Everything about my experience was fantastic. Keep it going. Illinois needs more of this!”

– Howard Dean, M.D.
former Vermont Governor and Democratic National Committee Chairman
The CCL brings outstanding speakers to the campus of Benedictine University. At its core, a liberal arts education challenges students to examine preconceived notions, to move from a familiar comfort zone and examine what forces them to confront real social and political issues and ideas. Two of the recent speakers that did this very effectively were Fr. Michael Pfleger of St. Sabina Church in Chicago and Michelle Alexander, author of “The New Jim Crow.” Both of them addressed issues of race, discrimination and poverty. They forced us to recognize that the United States is not a post-racial society and in fact cannot be if it refuses to acknowledge the very real and continued practice of racial discrimination and ignores the reality of poverty, income inequality and arbitrary policies which have made skin color a determining factor in the case of incarceration. The CCL speaker series presents audiences with challenging ideas that routinely get brushed aside but need to be kept front and center if the United States is to truly and completely achieve its core value of justice and equality for all.”

– Susan Mikula, Ph.D., acting dean of the College of Liberal Arts and professor of History
“I am thrilled to see Jim Ryan’s early vision for the CCL continue to evolve in new and exciting ways. So many of our students have learned from and been inspired by the broad spectrum of speakers we have brought to campus over the past several years. I am convinced that a center like ours is essential in developing strong civic-minded, ethical young leaders.”

– Tammy Sarver, Ph.D., J.D., professor of Political Science

“I was glad to learn about the Center for Civic Leadership because it provides you with an opportunity that not many people receive to study and engage at the highest levels at an institution that ascribes not only to impart wisdom, but to also engage students in critical-thinking and provide an environment that encourages questioning, dialogue and even disagreement.”

– Toni Preckwinkle
Cook County Board president

The CCL provides speakers and events at no cost to attendees in an effort to be inclusive and serve the most good. These events are made possible, in part, by donor contributions.
James F. Austin, Ph.D., president of the JFA Institute; Karen L. Daniel, J.D., clinical professor of Law and co-director of the Center on Wrongful Convictions; John Donahue, J.D., criminal defense attorney at Donahue, Sowa & Magana Attorneys at Law; and Jeffrey York, J.D., public defender for the DuPage County Circuit Court.

Paul D. Clement, J.D., former solicitor general for President George W. Bush

Michael Golden, author of “Unlock Congress”

Tom Skilling, WGN-TV chief meteorologist

James Hansen, Ph.D., climate change scientist

Department of Political Science Faculty

Phil Hardy, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
American Politics and Director of the CCL
phardy@ben.edu

Joel Ostrow, Ph.D.
Professor
International Relations
jostrow@ben.edu

Tammy Sarver, Ph.D., J.D.
Professor and Department Chair
Pre-Law
tsarver@ben.edu