



INITIATIVE FOR
CIVIC LEADERSHIP
AT UT DALLAS

**2025-2026 YEAR
IN REVIEW**



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About the Initiative



Founded in 2024, the Initiative for Civic Leadership (ICL) at UT Dallas empowers tomorrow's civic leaders today. Housed in the School of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences (EPPS), the Initiative provides talented undergraduate students from across UT Dallas with the opportunity to learn and intern with local government and community organizations throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

UT Dallas is a Carnegie Commission on Higher Education designated "R1" doctoral-granting university of very high research activity. The faculty includes members of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering, and recent freshman classes have featured close to 200 National Merit Scholars, one of the highest numbers in the nation.

Mission and Vision

The ICL empowers students to engage with their local community through a combination of classroom learning and hands-on internships. By immersing students in the governmental processes of the Dallas-Fort Worth area, we seek to instill an ethic of civic engagement and prepare students to understand and overcome the challenges within their communities.



Our Team



Dr. Amanda D. Clark
Director

Dr. Clark is an Assistant Professor of Instruction in political science. Her career has spanned both the private and public sectors. After a long career in the private sector in international trade, she received her PhD from Kent State University. In 2020, she served at the Palm Beach County Supervisor of Elections Office, where she ran early voting. Dr. Clark's research focuses on election administration, citizen engagement/democracy, and governance.



Ismael Romero
Program Specialist

Ismael Romero is a two-time UT Dallas alum with a bachelors in Public Affairs and masters in International Business. He has worked in multiple departments within UT Dallas such as Housing, Parking, Admissions and currently for the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences. His experience as an admissions counselor has helped him in the recruitment of upcoming cohort students and career advising.

Fall 2025 Cohort

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The Fall 2025 cohort was our second group of students. We almost doubled our inaugural cohort in size (from 5 to 9 students) in the group. The students were active in their internships, with many working for Members of Congress and the Texas Legislature.



(From left to right, back row): Tiziano Cecconato, Camila Loya, Kevin Loeza, Joaquin Moreno, Eric Sell, Ismael Romero (ICL program specialist)

(front row): Amanda Clark (ICL Director), Haadiyah Mohammed, Mia Files

(not pictured): Anshu Chundi, Joshua Montellano



Student Support

Through our work in the ICL, we strive to help students understand the opportunities and challenges of civic leadership today. We partner with our students to find enriching internship opportunities in policy areas that interest them. We also provide resume, cover letter, and interview prep in conjunction with the UTD Career Services office.



Engagement and Collaborative Partnerships

The ICL has fostered relationships with local city and county agencies. In Fall 2025, the ICL co-hosted a voter registration/education event with UT Dallas Student Government.





Spring 2026 Cohort

07

The Spring 2026 cohort was the largest to date, with 19 students in the group. While many of our students are political science majors and minors, we also welcomed students from Interdisciplinary Studies, Economics, and Business Analytics.



From left to right, first row: Michael Crain, Nivedha Maniv, David Kim, Tyler Hrozek, Ruth Garcia, Mayra Garcia, Giselle Bahena
Second row: Anshu Zutshi, Jasmine Kouhestani, Setareh Dodangeh, Jackson Logue, Ananya Mahodaya, Stepan Mamikonian, Nickolas Garcia, Sherlyn Dominguez, Ruby Rehman, Becca Ikle

(not pictured): Robert Mwangi, Akiva Ward



Engagement and Collaborative Partnerships



The ICL and UT Dallas Student Government hosted two former members of Congress to the UT Dallas campus on March 9-10, 2026. The Honorable Mike Capuano (MA-7, ret.) and the Honorable Thad McCotter (MI-11, ret.) met with students in a variety of settings. We are grateful for the conversation and the chance for our students to learn about serving from those that have!



Student Government President Giana Abraham (left) joined Jasmine Khouestani, Jackson Logue, Dr. Clark and the Congressmen for dinner. Also pictured is Mrs. Capuano.





Internships

As part of the cohort experience, students complete a public service internship. Our students serve in a range of nonprofit agencies and local government offices. Some of our internship locations included:



Voter Registration

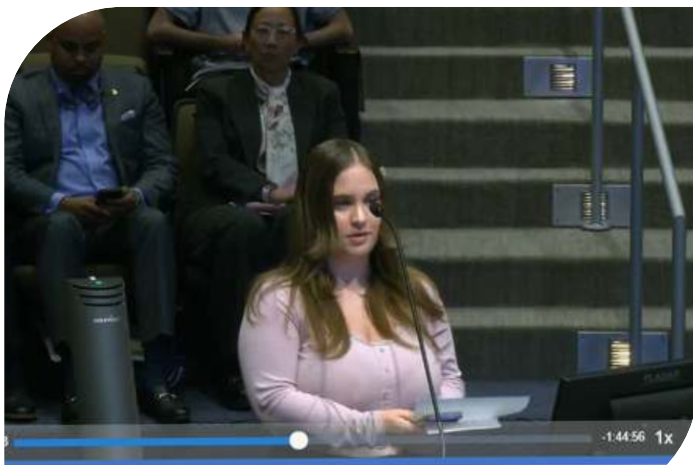
A few of our students worked for The Cornerstone Project, a nonpartisan youth voter registration organization. Senior Ananya Mahodaya (Spring 26) tabled in the plinth to help her fellow Comets register to vote.



Student Experience

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Eric Sell (first on the left) completed an internship with the regional office of U.S. Representative Julie Johnson.



Fall cohort member Mia Files spoke at a public meeting in Plano regarding the future of the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART).

Nickolas Garcia completed his internship at Collin County Clerk's Office. Nickolas worked with various departments within local government.



Student Experience

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Mayra Garcia (Spring 26) organized “Art the World” an event for Opening Doors International Services hosted at UT Dallas. The event brought awareness to the work their organization provides to the community.



Jasmine Kouhestani (Spring 26) (5th from left) attended the Dallas Bar Association’s event with former U.S. Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar. Jasmine interned with Judge Martin Hoffman for the spring semester.

Giselle Bahena (Spring 26) interned with Texas State Representative Mihaela Plesa. She was able to visit with constituents across her district and attend community events. Left, she is attending the Collin County Homeless Coalition luncheon.





Dannette Garcia, City of Richardson

Assistant City Manager, Richardson

Dannette Garcia, who serves as one of the assistant city managers of Richardson, spoke of her experiences managing a growing city. She outlined how city managers must work with state officials on new state laws.

North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG)

Carli Baylor, Communications Supervisor, spoke to the class about how the NCTCOG encourages public participation on transportation, economic development and public safety in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Province of Alberta, Canada

Dr. Rebekah Dowd, Senior Business Development & Policy Officer, discussed how she made the transition from academia to government service. The province of Alberta has many similarities to Texas and the two work together on many economic projects.

City of Dallas, Office of Sustainability

Oppong Hemeng, discussed the city's Comprehensive Environmental & Climate Action Plan (CECAP) and the eight goals that guide the department through the policy process.



Oppong Hemeng, City of Dallas

End of Semester

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End Of Year Celebration

The semester concluded by inviting all current and previous cohort members to celebrate the second year of the ICL program.



We extend our deepest thanks to all our guest speakers for the 2025-2026 academic year (in no particular order):

- Maggie Allen, Director of Innovation for Fort Worth Housing Solutions
- Russell Schaffner, Deputy County Administrator (Collin County)
- Dan Johnson, Richardson City Manager (retired)
- Eileen Morrow, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas
- Ian Seamans, Environment Texas
- Oppong Hemeng, City of Dallas Office of Sustainability
- Mak Kovar, Grants Administrator City of Mesquite
- Carli Baylor, Communications Supervisor North Central Texas Council of Governments
- Clarissa Clarke, North Texas Food Bank
- Amanda Rockow, Vice President Government Relations at UTD
- Dr. Tony Love, Program Head-Criminology at UTD
- Malissa Kouba, Assistant Administrator-Dallas County Elections Department
- Amanda Boone, Director of Research Integrity at UTD
- UTD Career Services
- Dr. Sarah Dornback, Senior Instruction Librarian at UTD
- Aimee Nemer, City Secretary (Richardson)
- Jennifer Stubbs, City Secretary (Garland)



We would like to thank the Kuhn Foundation for their generous support of our program! Their gift enabled us to provide needed funding for our students to take on unpaid internships this past year.



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