Georgia Perimeter College has joined The Democracy Commitment, a national initiative to get community college students actively engaged in civic learning and democratic practice beyond the ballot box.

GPC’s President Dr. Anthony Tricoli recently signed on as one of 23 U.S. community college presidents who will be involved with the national partnership.

“The goal of the program is that every graduate in a community college shall have had an education on the workings of democracy,” says Tricoli. “The Democracy Commitment was designed to help revive the civic learning and democratic engagement of Americans.”

That objective seems to have lost its emphasis in higher education over the years, notes Dr. Sean Brumfield, GPC’s executive director of the Atlanta Center for Civic Engagement and Service-Learning. According to a U.S. Census of the November 2008 presidential election, 41.5 percent of all Americans aged 18- 24 years didn’t even register to vote.

For those young people who do vote, their involvement in the democratic process often stops after they leave the voting booth.

“I think students understand the democratic process on a theoretical level; however, for many students, the only democratic participation undertaken is the physical act of voting,” says Brumfield. “The Democracy Commitment objective is for students to participate in the democratic process on a deeper, more experiential level through service learning and civic engagement, then they will more likely continue to participate in such activities after they graduate.”
The program is modeled after the American Democracy Project, a national coalition of public state colleges and universities committed to civic and democratic work, sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in partnership with the New York Times. Tricoli will join the other community college presidents in November in New York City, to officially kick off the initiative in an event sponsored by the newspaper.

As a signatory college for The Democracy Commitment, GPC will also convene a regional meeting of two-year colleges from surrounding states. “We hope to engage them in a conversation about the importance of integrating democratic thinking into the curriculum as well as spreading the word about The Democracy Commitment,” Brumfield says.

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Georgia Perimeter College, the third largest institution of the University System of Georgia, serves more than 25,000 students through four campuses and several sites in metro Atlanta. For additional information, visit www.gpc.edu.