

CIC brings author for symposium

Wildcats had the opportunity to show off how they have been involved in serving their communities on Wednesday afternoon at the Community Involvement Center's fifth

annual Service Symposium in the Shepherd Union Building.

Chad Saunders, marketing and program assistant for the WSU Community Involvement Center, said the Service Symposium is held toward the end of spring semester every year and is intended to showcase community involvement and community-engaged students.

Eric Liu, author, educator, civic entrepreneur and former White House speechwriter for the

Clinton administration, was the keynote speaker. Saunders said Liu was chosen because he's an advocate for citizenship and civic service, and his most recent book, "The Gardens of Democracy," is being read by student groups with the Community Involvement Center.

Addressing the crowd in the Wildcat Theater, Liu said Americans tend to view the world — especially government, civics and citizenship, and service opportunity — through a metaphorical lens as a machine. Taking the economy as an example, the economy needs to be fueled up, or is stalling, and people use this figurative language almost unknowingly.

"Our relationship to government oftentimes is the relationship that a frustrated person has standing in front of a vending machine — they just put in their coins and pressed their button, but didn't get the candy bar they wanted," Liu said. "So you're just cursing the machine and you're kicking it, but you kind of figure that's the extent of my relationship to this inert box called government."

Liu said there's a more apt and healthy metaphor, though, and that these institutions,



(Photo by: Tyler Brown) Eric Liu signs his book "The Gardens of Democracy" for Isabel Asensio, an associate professor of Spanish, at the Service Symposium.

such as citizenship and civic involvement, should be viewed as gardening. He said senses of community require seeding, feeding and weeding, and everyone has a responsibility to tend it. He said everyone is responsible to ensure this garden lives another season and thrives another season.

Liu also said society becomes how everyone behaves.

“When you choose to be not compassionate, society becomes not compassionate,” Liu said. “When you choose to be not engaged, society becomes not engaged.”

To illustrate, Liu said he saw a billboard along a frequently congested highway, and the billboard read, “You’re not stuck in traffic. You are traffic.”

Liu then applied this to aspects of community service.

“There is no way to kind of say, ‘Gosh, we have all these problems here, and I’m going to detach myself from them,’” Liu said. “We’re not stuck in broken politics in America. We are broken politics. We’re not stuck in a culture that walks past homeless people. We *are* that culture. We’re not stuck in a society of haves and have-nots. We *are* that society. We’re not stuck in a community that is losing its sense of civic engagement. We *are* that. Our choices and actions are contagious.”

After Liu spoke, the audience moved to the Fireplace Lounge and Shepherd Union Gallery, where student groups presented the information on service projects they have been involved with and working on. The 25-plus projects included engaging elementary students in science, technology, engineering and math programs, encouraging Utahns to have healthy diets and giving voice to sexual assault.

Chelsea Wessman, a junior at WSU studying interpersonal and family communication, is one of the students who presented details of her project. She was the director for the local winter games for Special Olympics Utah and handled the event management and planning. Wessman said the experience was one of the most rewarding she’s ever had.

“You get so much more out of it than you put in,” Wessman said. “I think being involved is one of the best things that I could have done for my college career. It really shaped what I wanted to do with my life, and it really affected how much I enjoyed my

time here at Weber State. I'd absolutely recommend it to anyone."

Saunders said the first step for individuals wanting to give back to their community is to visit the Community Involvement Center's website at www.weber.edu/community-involvement or stop by the center, Shepherd Union Building Room 327. Saunders said the Community Involvement Center's staff can help encourage interested students and show where opportunities lie in service, everywhere from elementary schools to retirement homes.

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