

Community Survey Leads to Learning from and Caring for Our Elders

Good Neighbor Initiative Survey

St. Louis Community College at Meramec

Donna Halsband – Academic Service-Learning/ Civic Engagement

Gerry Welch – Mayor of Webster Groves

Michael Fuller - Sociology

Donna Halsband, Service-Learning/ Civic Engagement Coordinator at St. Louis Community College at Meramec, attended the *Neighborhood Leadership Academy* sponsored by the Public Policy Research Center at the University of Missouri St. Louis in 2003. As her culminating project, she worked with their staff and other community partners to develop the *Good Neighbor Initiative Survey*. Students at SLCC Meramec had been involved in Service-Learning projects since 1997, working with numerous community partners, but had never conducted a “conversation” with the community to determine their needs and perceptions.

The survey was administered in two neighbors close to the Meramec campus of St. Louis Community College. Meramec President, Dr. Lynn Suydam and Donna met with each city’s mayor and city manager to ensure their support for the survey. Both city police chiefs were also consulted so that officers would be informed about students going door to door to administer the survey.

The first survey was done in Kirkwood in spring 2004. Two honors students assisted in mapping out the neighborhoods and dividing the city to ensure that all areas were included in the survey. Sociology students from Michael Fuller and Cindy Epperson’s classes went door to door to administer the survey. Donna provided in-class training for the students participating. 500 surveys were collected. This first survey was open-ended, which made the tabulation of data very difficult. After the results were tabulated, they were shared with the Kirkwood mayor, Mike Swoboda and his staff. It was determined that more should be done for older adults in the city, leading to the inclusion of *Older Adults - Honoring and Caring for Our Elders* to the established group of campus Good Neighbor Initiatives that include literacy, the environment, hunger and homelessness and health.

In the fall of 2004, the survey was revised and administered in the City of Webster Groves using the same basic process as had been used in Kirkwood. At the request of Webster Groves officials, students also administered a separate survey of older adults (collecting data for the City) in addition to the Good Neighbor Initiative survey. Approximately 680 surveys were collected. The results of the survey have been shared with the mayor’s Senior Roundtable and City Council, and have lead to several new community partnerships.

In the Spring of 2005, students from Michael Fuller’s Sociology class administered the Webster Groves Older Adults survey again. This survey was administered through Churches and at other locations where seniors gather; 230 surveys were collected.

As a result of the surveys, several pilot projects working with older adults have emerged. Students of Julie High (Physical Therapist Assistant program) and Janet Goddard (English department) worked with residents at Kirkwood House retirement center and other older adults

in the Fall. Students served as conversation partners and formed friendships with the residents. This Spring, Lisa Ebert in English has joined Janet, involving their composition students. An afternoon tea was held on campus at the beginning of the semester to introduce Meramec students to the residents of Crown Center. Julie High has developed a new partnership that will begin Summer, 2005. In addition, campus faculty in Nursing, English, Psychology and Physical Therapist Assistant, along with community partners, have formed a Learning Circle to determine the future direction for this initiative and study what other community colleges are doing in this area. Donna Halsband and others continue to meet with the Webster Senior Round Table, the Breakthrough Coalition, a networking organization of those who work with older adults, and others. Missouri Campus Compact grant monies will be used to support projects they identify to work with the elderly in the surrounding community.

The Good Neighbor Initiative – City of Webster Groves

Gerry Welch has been associated with St. Louis Community College for 25 years as a full-time faculty member in economics and also serving in a variety of administrative assignments including strategic planning. She currently teaches on a part-time basis and consults for the College.

Webster Groves is an inner ring suburb of the City of St. Louis with a population of 23,000. It is a city known for its historic neighborhoods and other gracious amenities. However, a sense of community is also a strong asset of Webster Groves: people have pride in their town, know each other, are active in civic affairs, and have an outstanding spirit of volunteerism. Gerry Welch was elected to the Webster Groves City Council in 1994 and is now in her second term as mayor of that community.

The association with St. Louis Community College and having a leadership role in Webster Groves, which is located in a city adjacent to Webster, has provided some nice opportunities to link these two “communities” together. This has been further fostered by an appreciation for the role of community in a person’s life and the belief that student learning is enhanced by community experiences.

Donna Halsband approached the City of Webster Groves in 2004 to explore the possibility of creating, implementing, and analyzing a community-wide survey to be administered by Meramec students through a service-learning project. The project in Kirkwood the previous year was quite successful and the city seized the opportunity to collect a similar data set.

We were grateful to have the opportunity to provide input to the questionnaire that was randomly sampled throughout every neighborhood in the city in order to collect valuable information. The initial survey in the fall of 2004 helped city officials and staff understand what members of the community identified as its advantages, or assets, and its disadvantages. Clearly, the identified disadvantages provided a set of issues to address.

The results of this survey, to date, are twofold. First, the survey helped to identify some of the problems/issues faced by Webster Groves seniors. (About 20% of the population is over 65 years of age.) This provided additional impetus for the survey directed toward seniors that was

conducted in the spring of 2005. Second, the community is engaging in a large-scale community-wide planning process. The information from the survey has been useful for the planning consultants.

The spring 2005 survey that was designed to reach seniors exclusively helps the city to better reach this population to identify their specific needs and issues. The Senior Roundtable, a group working to keep seniors in the community, has not had the resources for a comprehensive survey. The students have filled in an important gap for the Roundtable.

We look forward to continued work with the college and bringing students into the Webster Grove community.

The Good Neighbor Initiative – Sociology

Creating relevant learning experiences for college students in SOC 101 (Introduction to Sociology) was a challenge that Professor Michael Fuller encountered during his first semester of teaching in 1982. His solution was to conduct in-class surveys of students that would be the basis for statistical analysis and discussion. The Good Neighbor Initiative of St. Louis Community College offered a new opportunity in 2004 and 2005. Professor Fuller changed the focus to the communities situated near campus. Students collected data relevant to social issues with a special focus on the needs of older adults in Webster Groves, MO.

The details of the survey were spelled out in the syllabus and aspects of the study are incorporated into each week's lecture. For example, the lecture on methods of collecting and analyzing sociological data included a discussion of the pros and cons of the methods selected for our study.

Students were arbitrarily assigned into working groups by Professor Fuller and he met with each group to discuss their specific neighborhood and the logistics of collecting the data. Two hours of class lecture were "traded" for the four to six hours that most students spent collecting the data.

The Good Neighbor Initiative Survey did not end with the collection of the surveys. Each student gave an oral summary of their individual surveys and Professor Fuller did a real time transcription of the most salient facts onto a computer file that all students could access through the SLCC blackboard website. Students were encouraged to dialogue with Professor Fuller and their classmates about the specific responses that they collected. Some lively class discussions were sparked during this first phase of the data analysis. The oral reporting phase of the project required approximately 4 hours of class time with each student talking for approximately 4 to 5 minutes.

The second phase of data analysis consisted of the statistical tabulation of data. The analysis was kept to basic descriptive statistics so students with math anxiety would not panic. Several students graphed out the trends and realized how the data allowed for projections into the future of various social trends. Some of the statistical results were contrary to what the students had

expected and this created wonderful class discussions about the implications of the real world versus our common conceptions and misconceptions.

The third phase of the project was to compare our data with various websites relevant to the social history and social conditions of Webster Groves, MO. Census files, crime statistics, housing trend data and political donations were analyzed in class using several websites. Lots of class discussion focused on how to query the data files and what specific trends were revealed.

The fourth and final phase of this project was to have each student prepare a term paper (minimum page length of 5 pages). The paper is their chance to narrate their surveys and what they learned in the classroom discussions during phase two and three. Many students write papers closer to 10 pages in length. The final part of their paper is to offer specific recommendations to the mayor of Webster Groves about what they discovered and how political policy could be used to change social problems that they detected.

Our session will present the perspectives of each presenter in this project and the results of several pilot projects across campus in English Composition and Physical Therapy, and how this project has evolved into a planning initiative. Participants will take away copies of the survey, student training materials and strategies for developing their own program.