

**Las Pintas Project:
CCNCCE 2005 Collaboration Award Winner, International Category**

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Johnson County Community College is pleased that its Las Pintas Project has been selected to receive the 2005 CCNCCE Service-Learning and Civic Engagement Collaboration Award in the International category. The project exemplifies the goals, methods, and outcomes of service-learning, and reflects the vision and values of the college. In our portion of this joint session, presenters will provide an overview of JCCC's international service-learning project, describing its history, philosophy, partners, goals, components, and outcomes. Photos will provide a visual enhancement of this powerful, heart-warming project.

As the cornerstone of JCCC's community engagement and civic responsibility initiatives, service-learning was introduced in 1993. Over 5,000 students, 75 faculty, and 150 community organizations, schools, and care facilities in the metropolitan Kansas City area have participated since that first year. The program maintains high standards of academic integrity and meaningful service and emphasizes diversity, reflection, reciprocity, and development.

The Las Pintas International Service Learning Project began in 1996 when JCCC's International Education coordinator and a sociology professor visited the site of El Centro Integral Comunitario (CIC) during a service learning conference in Guadalajara, Mexico. CIC had been started by a local doctor, architect, engineer, and social worker who were determined to improve the conditions in the impoverished community of Las Pintas.

The community lacked basic resources and services such as clean water and sewer systems, as well as adequate food, housing, schools, and health care. Consequently, these

dedicated professionals established CIC to “make a common effort to construct a community that is more involved, restored and organized.” Their efforts have focused on direct services such as education, medical care, alternative energy technology, assistance with construction and, simultaneously, residents have developed a sense of community and empowerment.

Recognizing a unique opportunity, the partnership between JCCC and CIC was created. In addition to facilitating the goals of CIC, JCCC sought to immerse its students and staff in a relevant service project and to enhance an educational experience with international, intercultural, and inter-disciplinary components. Planners confirmed needs and feasibility, identified skills and resources, developed an action plan, and delegated responsibilities.

Early in 1998, a JCCC team was selected and pre-departure training was conducted. Sessions were held on team building, communications, Spanish language, local history, poverty awareness, cultural mores, health and safety, logistical issues, and even brick-laying. Reflection was introduced through discussion of selected readings; travel and scholarship funds were solicited; donations of medical and educational supplies were acquired.

Finally in May, twelve students along with six staff and faculty members left Kansas City to spend ten days in Las Pintas, not only digging the foundation, mixing mortar, and laying bricks to secure the CIC clinic and classroom, but also making home health visits, installing electricity, repairing the water pump and solar water heater, presenting scholarships to two students, and distributing school supplies and 300 pairs of children’s shoes.

Members of the team learned a great deal about themselves, about poverty, about Mexican culture, and about teaching and learning in a friendly, but unfamiliar, environment. The work, indeed the experience, wasn’t always what had been expected, or what had been prepared for, but everyone demonstrated perseverance and teamwork. American and Mexican

partners formed a learning community—collaborating, switching roles as the tasks demanded, taking lessons from whomever had the most information and skill, and working as equals.

Enthusiastic consensus confirmed that the project had been successful. Critical evaluation concluded that another JCCC team should, and could, return the following year. The decision to send another team “next year” has been repeated annually, with two separate teams being sent each year since 2001.

After each trip, formal and informal evaluations, needs assessments, and observations have prompted discussions between CIC and JCCC coordinators—resulting in expanded services, improved logistics, and enhanced learning. In 1999, health care replaced construction as the primary focus, with JCCC nursing instructors and students conducting home health visits, health education sessions, immunizations, and clinical assessments. In 2001, JCCC organized a second trip, comprised of dental hygiene instructors and students. JCCC’s Early Childhood Education Program joined the project the following year. As needs emerge and are identified and articulated by the leaders and residents of Las Pintas, JCCC will continue to help find solutions by linking related academic programs willing to contribute faculty and student expertise and energy with the enthusiasm and generosity of Las Pintas.

Annual statistics reflect ambitious workloads. Last year, the nursing team saw over 1,000 patients; the dental hygiene team evaluated and treated over 500; 150 young children participated in schoolroom activities; and scholarships will allow 50 students, ages 6-19, to attend school this year, rather than go to work to help support their families. The impact of this project is also evident in the increased participation by the people in Las Pintas, who now not only receive services, but share responsibility, service, and advocacy. The project has energized the community and helped many gain confidence and self-worth.

Certainly, JCCC students benefit from this international partnership. But the increase in numbers alone (from twelve students in 1998 to 27 in 2004), shows an incomplete picture of the impact. Quite simply, the experience changes JCCC students—not only enhancing intellectual and personal development, but also influencing career/life decisions, and social and civic commitment. Students use critical thinking skills throughout this powerful learning experience as they face challenges and solve problems in different settings and situations. They practice technical skills, develop leadership ability, and synthesize knowledge from multiple sources. Students lead daily group reflection sessions designed to help participants process their experiences. Additionally, students are encouraged to journal daily for individual reflection. Student evaluations clearly express profound impact: “It transformed my life and way of thinking,” “I learned more in one week than I did in one semester of traditional classes,” and, “Giving without taking, understanding without judging, respect without pity.”

The project requires a great deal from its faculty leaders, not only for the responsibility on-site, but also for the year-long process of planning and training a team to survive and thrive in Las Pintas. However, personal and professional rewards outweigh the time and effort which faculty invest in the project. Programs and articles on the Las Pintas project have been presented and published for local, regional, and national conferences and audiences. Instructors are re-energized as they view the learning process in their students.

The project is a visible example of the college’s goals for community engagement. In further recognition of and response to emerging student and community needs, International Awareness Field Study, a two-hour course based on the service learning pedagogy was introduced in 2004 to prepare students for international service. A Spanish course for health professionals is being designed to prepare students for service to the growing Hispanic

population in Kansas City.

Internal institutional collaboration has been strengthened at JCCC through the Las Pintas project. Three faculty normally accompany each team and have represented various disciplines in career and technical programs, foreign language, social sciences, education, and the sciences. Other departments and student organizations assist with the project annually, including: International Education, Student Services, Instruction, Community-Based Learning, Center for Teaching & Learning, Staff Development, the JCCC Foundation Office and student organizations such as Phi Theta Kappa, Student Senate, and the International Club.

JCCC's experience in Las Pintas has been exceptionally rewarding. Many of the outcomes were targeted: student growth, community development; others have been unexpected: internal institutional collaborations, visibility, support and approval from the home community. And, the strength and magnetism of the project was unimagined.

The Las Pintas partnership is a model that can certainly be replicated by other institutions. However, schools shouldn't view the current complexity and conclude that the project is too daunting to begin. It has been evolving carefully and deliberately for eight years. Furthermore, there are opportunities for inter-cultural partnerships closer to home, in pockets of diverse, isolated populations in rural communities, inner cities, or neglected neighborhoods which would offer similar opportunities for student and community development and yet acknowledge time and financial constraints of many community college students. The challenges of international, inter-cultural partnerships are great---but the rewards are profoundly greater.