

## **Got Buy In?**

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### **Foundations**

Collaboration across academic disciplines and college offices can be difficult. However, with the paradigm shift to more student-centered academic environments, communication and collaboration across such divides becomes increasingly important.

Northampton Community College's (NCC) Monroe Campus is approximately 35 miles away from the "main" campus. This separation presents challenges and opportunities. Resources, staff and time are scarce. However, our newer campus is free from the academic tradition of insulated offices and departments. Collaboration is necessary when resources are limited.

In the end, we face the same obstacles faced by staff in many community colleges: buy in. How do we get a diverse population of students, faculty, offices, clubs and interests to buy into civic engagement? Just as importantly, how can these diverse groups integrate their efforts to maximize community impact? This session will address these themes.

Over the past two years, the Monroe Campus Sociology Department and Student Affairs Office have partnered to address some of these issues. These efforts were inspired by a growing student population and support staff, and the results from the Student Survey on Civic Engagement which was conducted by NCC in 2005. Among the important survey findings are: college wide, just 37% of students were aware that NCC provides community service opportunities for students (27% of Monroe Campus

students), and 66% agree or strongly agree that volunteering in the community enhances the academic experience.

We began with the idea that many students would be willing to participate in civic engagement related activities if opportunities to do so were made known to them. We embraced the “if you build it, they will come” philosophy. We decided that a fantastic way to generate student interest would be to create initiatives that would potentially engage students (and college staff) in a variety of different ways: through faculty/coursework, service learning, student clubs, student activities, and college programs. So began the Art in Schools program, our first successful collaboration.

The Art in Schools program began as a project-based service learning assignment, was passed on to the NCC Student Leadership program as a community activity, and culminated with significant student club involvement. From start to finish, the program lasted for approximately twelve months and required students to design, coordinate and implement a plan for project completion. In the end, the Art in Schools program provided all 285 children in a local elementary school with a bag full of art supplies, so as to allow each child to have art supplies in their home for use over the summer months. Additionally, the Art in Schools program donated art supplies to the school’s resource-strapped art department.

We consider this program to be important for several reasons. It required NCC staff to collaborate across divisions and offices. Students then followed our lead and collaborated with one another. Students set the parameters of this project; we simply gave them the idea, the contacts and the support. So many distinct student groups and organizations were involved; it was truly a campus wide effort.

Also, because the Art in Schools program targeted one elementary school, it demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating efforts to maximize community impact. We believe this and subsequent projects have helped to shift the culture of our campus. We notice an exciting trend: students seem more likely to work together as faculty and staff work together. Partnerships between student organizations are on the rise.

Finally, the success of the Art in Schools program has led to the development of additional programs that follow a similar path to completion. We recently partnered with Shoes that Fit, a national organization that seeks to raise donations of new season appropriate shoes for children in need. Again, this program began with the efforts of service learning students and eventually expanded to larger campus-wide involvement. Approximately 100 pairs of new winter boots were donated to Morey Elementary School.

### **Into the Future**

A growing number of academic departments have plans to collaborate with the Office of Student Affairs in Fall 2007. On the agenda are initiatives that address local disaster preparedness and create opportunity for community dialog on important social issues (National Issues Forum).

In the end, we believe that collaborating across departments and divisions on civic engagement related programs has led to an increase in overall collaboration on campus, has positively impacted the culture of our campus, has had a positive impact on the student learning, and has benefited the community.

### **General Description of Session**

Many community college faculty and staff face the same challenge: buy in. How do we get a diverse population of students, faculty, offices, clubs and interests to buy into

civic engagement? Just as importantly, how can these diverse groups integrate their efforts to maximize community impact? This session will address these themes.

We'll begin with an interactive exercise designed to demonstrate the importance of collaboration across academic divisions and departments as well as collaboration among students. We'll then discuss collaboration strategies and potential consequences, sharing our experiences along the way.

### **Session Goals**

- Demonstrate the importance of cross-departmental collaboration in creating meaningful civic engagement related opportunities for students
- Demonstrate the importance of incorporating student voice into civic engagement activities
- Share and discuss best practices