

**Collaboration With Social Agencies**  
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By 2003, community colleges were developing service learning programs across the nation—but not in Georgia, which even today ranks among the three states with the nation’s lowest percentage of college students who volunteer (AP). Chattahoochee Technical College (CTC) in Marietta, Georgia, established a service learning initiative in winter 2003, and in less than four years, the college has fully institutionalized a highly successful program involving 33 community non-profits and over 1500 students on three campuses in two suburban Atlanta counties. For CTC, service learning ushered in a new pedagogy designed to improve learning and teaching experiences and to increase student engagement. Initial challenges were many: funding limitations, faculty unfamiliar with/resistant to service learning, and non-traditional students with a weak history of volunteerism. On the other hand, an inspired Initiative Committee of faculty and staff and one potential community partner were prepared to be agents of change.

In year one, the original Initiative Committee evolved into the Service Learning Advisory Committee, with student and community representation. The Director of Career Services divided her time and assumed the role of Service Learning Director, and the Cabinet agreed to include the new program in the Student Services Department. We secured our first partner, an “umbrella” non-profit agency serving the community through a variety of programs. The Center for Family Resources served as a clearinghouse for us, guiding us to other partners and project opportunities. Their CEO sat on our Advisory Committee and attended conferences with us. Our effort gained momentum when the college won an AACC Service Learning Mentee College Grant, which provided three-year funding and guidance as we identified needs, recruited faculty, explained the critical reflection component, assisted with re-design of syllabi across the

curriculum, and helped students find their niche as community volunteers. In year one, CTC sponsored two faculty training events featuring out-of-state speakers. Student evaluations of service learning projects in technical and general education courses consistently indicated unanticipated commitment among students. As a result, faculty became more interested in helping students use classroom theory to solve community problems. Our first major project was *The Tapestry of Immigration* project, required by the Horizons grant. The Center for Family Resources steered us to Cobb Senior Services. This agency helped our English Instructor, Sean Brumfield, set up interviews with seniors and our students all over Cobb County. Students recorded seniors' recollections of their native countries and cultures. Students expanded their research abilities and refined their writing skills by including information from the interviews in compositions. The interviews were recorded and returned to the seniors on CD's. Year two began with more full-time *and* adjunct faculty introducing service learning options. The Early Childhood program students created print brochures on parenting topics for a local agency. They also partnered with the local battered women's shelter. The physics instructor partnered with an elementary school. Physics students did demonstration electrical circuit labs with fourth graders. A mini-grant from AACC facilitated state-wide training through a CTC seminar attended by faculty and staff from the state's technical colleges, administrators from the GA Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE), and visitors from two neighboring states. The highlight of year three was the introduction of CTC's Freshman Experience (FX), the first teaching-learning experience of its kind in a DTAE college. With service learning to provide the "glue," disparate FX students bonded, and cohort records indicate increased retention and attainment. Again the Center for Family Resources provided us with a major project involving 500 students. Students collected food for Thanksgiving baskets, helping to provide over 1200 families with food for a Thanksgiving meal. They not only collected food, but worked a shift at the Cobb Civic Center to organize and distribute the food to the families.

In years three and four, additional faculty adopted service learning. Website design students have designed websites for 5 agencies so far. Accounting students have prepared taxes for seniors in partnership with Paulding Senior Center.

CTC's Grants Office sought supplemental funding; thus far, four awards have helped support the service learning program and provide training from AACC and model college programs. A VISTA volunteer joined the staff in 2007 to facilitate program growth. CTC was awarded a State Farm Good Neighbor Service Learning grant for National Youth Service Day. On April 20, our Environmental Horticulture program will plant a garden which will grow vegetables all summer. The vegetables will be contributed to our local food bank, The Warehouse of Hope. Students from English classes and Early Childhood classes will help care for the garden all summer.

The college has provided grant matches through departmental budgets and in-kind contributions. Program management demands about 20 hours per week from the Director, and the Service Learning Advisory Committee meets quarterly, or more frequently, if necessary. CTC has funded travel and conference attendance for faculty while grants have provided funds for students and partners to attend out-of-state training. College space has been used for workshops designed to provide professional development hours.

CTC has created a program with local, state, and national impact. Locally we have provided over 4,000 direct and 2,610 indirect service hours, positively impacting people of all ages and racial/ethnic backgrounds. We have trained faculty at two-year colleges across Georgia. Our faculty and students have presented at national conferences, including AACC (2004 and 2007), League for Innovation (2005) and CCNCCE (2006). CTC was selected as an AACC Service Learning Mentor College and will mentor Baton Rouge Community College and Queensborough Community College for 3 years.

Program structure, budgets, and management are major challenges inherent in service learning; we know how to maximize existing resources to create new teaching and learning experiences that will inspire, not overburden, faculty and engage students. We have learned to listen when community partners and students identify problems and suggest reasonable solutions. Finally, we have developed and piloted successful projects applicable in technical and general education courses; we are still learning to commit resources wisely.