

Empowering the Communities:
Honors and Service Learning as Catalysts for Positive Social Change

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This session will highlight current service learning projects being carried out at Cochise College located in Southeastern Arizona. The presentation focuses on five unique, interrelated, Honors/Service Learning Projects at Cochise College devoted to changing elusive dreams into a real, more promising future. The projects are COOKIES (Creating Optimistic Outlooks and Keeping Interest in Educational Success), Holocaust, Martin Luther King, Alternative Spring Break, Reach to Teach (R2T) and On the Shoulders of Giants. Envisioning youth and entire communities as catalysts for social change, each project deals with “unfinished business” of our global society, from eliminating racism, prejudice and intolerance and promoting academic success from K through college; to involving college students in the rebuilding of their communities. During the session, each of the projects will be highlighted including how the project was started, the goals of the project, the obstacles that have been overcome, the successes of the project, and future plans for the projects. The presenters will show how the projects have evolved to become important tools in student learning and opportunities for growth outside of the traditional classroom. The session will also include a small group discussion portion in which participants will discuss ways to overcome challenges and implement service learning at their own institutions.

Cochise College serves roughly 14,000 students through 2 campuses and 3 centers scattered throughout Cochise County and an online campus. The students come from a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. At one of the main campuses in Sierra Vista, AZ, a large portion of the population is military related bringing students to Cochise College that

have been transplanted from a variety of locations. Many of the students are non-traditional and are juggling the demands of work, school, and family. The Sierra Vista campus serves the largest number of students. The other main campus in Douglas, AZ contrasts significantly to the Sierra Vista campus. This campus lies at the doorstep to Mexico, only 10 miles from the border. The majority of students come from low economic households whose parents may not have completed high school. A number of students also cross the border each day to attend classes and many others have families across the border. In these two very different communities there are very similar needs that have been met by these service-learning projects. Students are empowered to implement social change and rise above the challenges they face in order to complete college and continue on to become valuable assets to their community.

The service-learning program at Cochise College was initiated by interested students and their instructors as opposed to the institution's administration. However, since its original implementation the administration has supported and encouraged service-learning and has allowed the program to grow. Service-learning embodies the vision of the college which is "to be a learning community held in high esteem by members of its communities, providing high quality learning opportunities for its citizens." Part of the definition of a learning community at the college includes: "Makes learning possible not only in the classroom but outside, through a myriad of activities and experiences, using any number of tools to enhance learning, and Extends learning not only to students but to all members of the college community so that a feeling of collegiality abounds." Service-learning at Cochise College helps to accomplish these goals. As students implement and participate in these projects they increase their own learning opportunities as well as reach out the community.

Though the support of the administration is important it is the instructors and students that truly make service-learning possible. The purpose of the presentation is to demonstrate that a relatively small community college can achieve great results if the project emanates from the students' desire to make a positive, powerful difference in the lives of community, youth and their community in general. Motivated, caring students, not large amounts of funding and large administrative units, are all that is necessary to change lives and remake our nation's future, one life and one community at a time. Student designed and implemented service learning projects can change lives of our future generation and rebuild communities.

Another goal of this session is to collectively create ideas, for all schools, to overcome problems and implement in their service learning programs. All service projects must be student driven, institutionalized (through curricular development), be given administrative support, and receive a minimal amount of financial support. Each of the projects detailed in the presentation can be replicated at any institution, no matter how small or financially limited. There are no barriers to age, abilities or disability. The only potential barrier is the finger print clearance requirement for participation in COOKIES, the elementary school tutoring/mentoring project. The impact of each project on both the service recipients and the students involved will be highlighted.

Anyone desiring to create and subsequently institutionalize low-cost, high impact service learning projects at their institution or in their community will benefit from the presentation. The five Cochise College projects have directly impacted the lives of over 3,500 individuals since 2005. The institution spends no more than \$10,000 per year and relies on faculty and administrator volunteers, in addition to college student leaders, to design, implement and support the five projects. Two of the five projects have received national recognition (Community

College National Center for Community Engagement, 2008 Service Learning and Civic Engagement Collaboration Award) and the five projects earned placement on the National Presidents Honor Roll in 2010. Additionally, the COOKIES, Holocaust, MLK, Alternative Spring Break, and R2T projects have been selected for extensive presentations at three Western Regional Honors Council Conventions. The benefit is that these projects demonstrate what can be accomplished by a well organized, motivated group of individuals.

Youth are our future. It is our responsibility to help shape and empower them to make a positive impact on their communities and the greater society while achieving their college degrees. Even though these projects are successful, the presenters are always striving to expand and explore more opportunities for service learning.