Building and Strengthening Communities through Service Learning and Civic Engagement

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CNCS and HUD Presentation
October 20, 2011
Raritan Valley Community College

- Enrolls 8,500 students each semester of which 3,800 are part-time
- Enrolls 18,300 students in non-credit courses, including customized training, workforce development, allied health, professional development and youth programs
- Provides more than 70 associate degree and certificate programs
Mission Statement

*Raritan Valley Community College is an educational community that works to develop critical thinking, foster intellectual curiosity, promote leadership, encourage social responsibility, support personal growth, and sustain engaged citizenship within a diverse population of students and community members (2010).*
Annual Program Participation:

- **1,000 students** perform community service
- **65 faculty** offer service learning
- **70 courses** from all academic disciplines
- **250 community organizations**
- **30,000 hours** of service provided to community
- **$600,000** donated as economic equivalent to community
Why Offer Service Learning

- Meets the mission of community colleges
- Links course work to practical applications, career exploration and employment
- Helps to develop student’s academic skills, self-esteem and confidence
- Creates a connection between personal development and civic responsibility
- Builds relations with the community
- Promotes student retention
Improving Student Learning Outcomes with Service Learning

American Association of Community Colleges reveals that:

- Students who participate in service learning score higher on institutional learning outcomes such as critical thinking, communication, civic responsibility, academic development, and educational success.

- Students saw themselves as more competitive in the job market than those who did not have service learning experience.

- 85% of these students believed that service learning should be practiced in more courses at their colleges and 87% would encourage other students to take courses that offer service learning.

The entire text of the research brief may be found at www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/horizons/Documents/slorb_jan2010.pdf
Alignment with Learning Objectives

• Critical thinking, problem solving and information literacy skills
• Communication skills
• Diversity/multi-cultural understanding
• Civic and social responsibility
• Career exploration
• Research skills
• Team work
Service Learning Activities

• Providing tutoring, mentoring and recreational activities
• Developing marketing plans and working on fundraising events
• Organizing food and blood drives and pet adoptions
• Providing nutritional plans and implementing low-impact cardiovascular exercise programs
• Tackling issues on recycling and reuse, stream clean-ups, rainforest protection, endangered plant species conservation, land and open space preservation.
• Helping in areas of low-income housing, family law, consumer protection, mediation and tax preparation
Valuable Community Assets

- Skills and expertise from different individuals, associations and organizations
- Knowledge of local, regional and national issues
- Diversity of thought, languages, backgrounds, culture
- Key community leadership
Valuable College Assets

• College students provide targeted assistance at no economic cost and increase diversity of volunteer base

• Active assistance can help organization achieve its objectives and services

• Students can join staff or agency board

• Clients discover there is hope and people care and often learn that others share their interests
Courses Offering Service Learning

- Introductory level
- Capstone
- Career & Technical
- Honors
- Majors
- Independent Study
- Teacher Education
- Developmental
Co-Curricular Engagement

• Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), an international, non-profit organization, that mobilizes students to make a difference in their communities while developing their skills to become socially responsible business leaders

• Student Clubs organize fund-raisers, collections for children, visits to hospitals and nursing homes and service projects. Example: Orgullo Latino Club sponsors a program for 100 high school students to promote post education among Latino students through workshops, testing, advising, counseling, financial aid for college preparation
Diverse Community Partners

• Non-profit agencies
• Nursing homes, hospitals and clinics
• Senior citizen centers
• Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples
• Youth-serving organizations (YMCA, Scouts)
• Community centers and civic organizations
• Libraries
• Day care centers and pre-schools
• K-12 schools, ESL centers, after-school programs
• Police and Probation Departments, Court Houses
Populations Served

- Minorities
- Low-income
- Immigrants
- International
- Incarcerated
- Disabled
- Homeless
- Elderly
- Children, youth, families and single parents
Community Issues Addressed

- Literacy
- English as a second language
- Environment
- Health and safety
- Housing and development
- Hunger and homelessness
- Legal rights
- Multicultural understanding
- Substance abuse
- Child Care
Institutional Support

• Maintains centralized offices and full-time staff committed to engagement efforts
• Develops forms and procedures to document and assess community-based work
• Recognizes and celebrates community involvement
• Seeks funding for scholarships to support engagement efforts
• Develops integrated and complimentary engagement activities
Assessment of Student Learning

• Reflection Activities
• Student Surveys
• Open Letters
• Agency feedback surveys
• Community Advisory Boards

“The Service Learning program at RVCC has given us the opportunity to work with dedicated young people who are the future for social responsibility and a better community. Making a difference for them now means having them make a difference for us and our clients in time to come.” (Resource Center of Somerset, serving victims of domestic abuse)
Campus Compact
Expanding Opportunities

• Developing a New Jersey State Campus Compact with 19 institutions including two and four-year public, private and independent

• Linking presidents, community service directors, faculty and students with a statewide network of practitioners

• Programming for awards, conferences, grants, trainings through National Campus Compact

• Building an infrastructure for sustaining civic engagement in higher education
Resources

• Corporation for National and Community Service: www.nationalservice.gov
• Campus Compact: www.compact.org
• Community College National Center for Community Engagement: www.mesacc.edu/engagement
• American Association of Community College: www.aacc.nche.edu/servicelearning
• National Service-Learning Clearinghouse: www.servicelearning.org
The Challenge
What can we do together?

• How can community colleges be a resource for the larger community that they serve?
• What can community colleges be doing to prepare for the future needs of the community?
• How can the community help their local community college serve them better?