HUD's 2006 Community Outreach Partnership Centers Conference
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Models for Institutionalizing Community-University Partnerships
On Campus and In the Community

"By now, most members of the academy and our community partners understand the 'whys' for engagement. What is needed is not another call to 'give engagement a try.' Instead, we believe it is time to call the question: The question of commitment. If engagement is to fulfill the promise we believe it holds—to reinvigorate higher education's understanding of its relationship to civic life, to rejuvenate learning and discovery, and to help create the academic template for leadership in a new century—it will require a new and deeper level of commitment across the academy to move beyond model programs, first adopters and pilot programs. It will require institutionalizing engagement in ways that are pervasive, creative and sustainable."
> *Calling the Question: Is Higher Education Ready to Commit to Community Engagement?*
> A Wingspread Statement 2004 www.milwaukeeidea.org

Mercer University: Mercer Center for Community Engagement (MCCE)
A Case Study of Institutionalization of Civic Engagement

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1. How Is Civic Engagement Defined at Mercer?

- Community engagement is the primary **focus** of civic engagement at Mercer. Community engagement forges long-term, multi-dimensional, genuinely reciprocal partnerships between the institution and the community to leverage systemic change to address deep-seated community problems. At Mercer, the elements of community engagement include neighborhood revitalization, after-school partnerships, and a public health initiative. Since 1999, the COPC investment of $550,000 has been matched by $630,000 in direct investment and $2.247 million in indirect investment by the University and has leveraged $46.315 million in external funding for community engagement partnership projects.

  ("By '*community engagement*' we mean applying institutional resources (e.g., knowledge and expertise of students, faculty and staff, political position, buildings and land) to address and solve challenges facing communities through collaboration with these communities. The methods for community engagement of academic institutions include community service, service-learning, community-based participatory research, training and technical assistance, capacity-building and economic development." (Gelmon SB et. al. "Building Capacity for Community Engagement: Institutional Self-Assessment," Community-Campus Partnerships for Health www.ccph.info))

- Service-learning is a primary **means** of civic engagement at Mercer. Service-learning promotes academically relevant student-learning through effective service experiences

and learning that is regularly assessed, fully reflective, and well integrated into course work. At Mercer, service-learning is a University-wide objective as a part of the University's accreditation process.

- Student ethical and leadership development through community service and engagement is a primary **purpose** of civic engagement at Mercer. Civic engagement builds institutional partnerships across schools and colleges and between academic and student support units to engage community resources in the development of student leadership potential in their future professions and communities, with particular emphasis on deepening vocation, infusing civic responsibility, and encouraging holistic student development (apprenticeships of head, hand, *and* heart). At Mercer, ethical and leadership development are University-wide objectives as a part of the University's accreditation process.

2. How did Civic Engagement get started at Mercer?

Benchmarks of Engagement/Institutionalization		
1996	President commits to explore possibilities for partnerships	
1998	MCCE formed	MCCE reports to Dean of Liberal Arts
1999	COPC grant: geographic focus; grassroots capacity building, educational partnerships, establish CDC	MCCE reports to President
2000	Knight Foundation grant: major long-term funding, capitalize CDC, IDA program	
2001	Lilly Endowment grant begins service-learning initiative in University Commons	Commons reports to Provost
2002		MCCE reports to Provost
2003	COPC "New Directions" grant: neighborhood leadership & public health	
2004	Commons service-learning consolidated in MCCE	
2005	5-year Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) adopted as SACS accreditation requirement: ethics – service-learning – leadership Inclusion in *Colleges with a Conscience* (Princeton Review & Campus Compact)	
2006	Reformation of MCCE to encompass all University civic engagement, including QEP	

Soft $$ ⟶ Hard $$

Ad hoc ⟶ Dedicated Staff

Unit Driven ⟶ University Priority
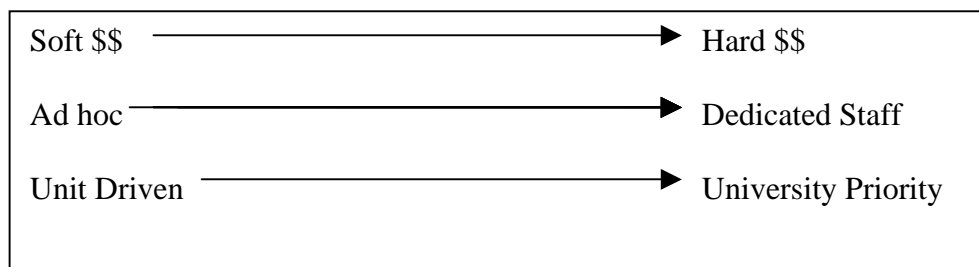
3. **What are the motivations for Civic Engagement at Mercer University (in order of priority)?**

    *   To anchor the community that hosts and supports our institution. I.e., how do we recruit and retain students and faculty/staff and maintaining funding *in a declining community?*

    *   To engage and invest an increasingly diverse student body in self-motivated, critical learning. I.e., how do we design liberal education for indifferently-motivated and under-prepared students?

    *   To position ourselves in an increasingly competitive educational marketplace. I.e., how do we create a campus culture and live out a mission that adds unique value to a liberal education and, thus, defines for us a distinctive market niche and constituency?

    *   To undergird for the long run the public value of American higher education and its autonomy. I.e., how do we help maintain the integrity of the professions and of the professors who educate the professionals in the face of an increasing loss of authority and trust in the professions and in higher education, coupled with increasing economic and political pressure on the practice of the professions and on the traditional purposes of higher education?

    *   To develop the next generation of leaders and citizens to preserve and extend the unique promise of American democracy. I.e., how do we educate for civic responsibility, critical sophistication, and personal empowerment in a mass democracy where ordinary citizens feel powerless in the face of vast governmental power, global economic forces, rapid technological and scientific change, special-interest politics, sound-bite public discourse, and omnivorous consumerism?

4. **Continuing Challenges to Sustaining Civic Engagement at Mercer University (in order of Difficulty)**

    *   <u>Inertia</u>: Higher education possesses enormous institutional and professional inertia.

    *   <u>Magnitude of Change Needed</u>: A *transformation* of pedagogy, scholarship, and reward systems is needed, not just reform. Who has the fire in their belly for it?

    *   <u>Local Political Challenges</u>: Requires the *community* to collaborate. It means overcoming politics—building capacity—establishing trust—sharing authority—sharing decision-making—sharing funding.

    *   <u>Creativity and Resilience Required</u>: No universal models can exist for this work. Every local situation is different: *your* institutional history and character, *your* constituencies, *your* community will dictate the form and tone of *your* community engagement. As a consequence, you must be ready for big mistakes and significant set backs—and be able to learn from them and go on.

- <u>Lack of funding</u>. Long-term transformational development needs tend to be mismatched with short-term available funding.

- <u>Fragility</u>: The start-up phases (5-10 years) are fragile and highly vulnerable to leadership changes.

- <u>Talent Required</u>: Key charismatic and politically astute change agents are necessary at first.

- <u>Vision Required</u>: Top academic leadership must be willing to take risks, get the big big picture, and act for the very long range.