



COPC CENTRAL

Engaged Colleges Are Central to Strong Communities

Alabama College Reaches Out to Its Community

Students attending Gadsden State Community College (GSCC) and residents of Alabama's East Gadsden community are quickly discovering that service learning is a win-win situation for everyone involved. Through service learning, GSCC students are



Representatives from GSCC, Greater Gadsden Housing Authority, Gadsden Public Library, and Etowah Council on Aging gather for the grand opening of the Starnes Park Library.

being given the opportunity to apply the lessons they have learned in the classroom to real-world issues that exist in the surrounding community of approximately 50,000 residents.

What do the residents of Gadsden receive with this approach that turns education into community action?

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Community Colleges—Centers of Educational Opportunity

For nearly 100 years, community colleges have served the needs of undergraduate students interested in establishing a strong academic foundation or learning the skills necessary to prosper in their community. These public, private, and tribal institutions serve more than 11.6 million students and confer more than 490,000 associate degrees and nearly 235,000 two-year certificates each year. And according to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 46 percent of all U.S. undergraduates attend community colleges.

An American Invention

For many Americans, community colleges are the first step to begin their postsecondary academic pursuits or learn new skills necessary in the modern workplace. The AACC describes community colleges as an American invention that puts publicly funded higher education at close-to-home facilities. Community colleges allow people working full or part time to fit college classes into their schedules. Many college graduates return to community colleges to upgrade their technology skills or train for new careers. These 2-year institutions of higher education also offer English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and remedial courses for individuals who need to improve reading, writing, or math skills.

In addition to convenience and flexibility, lower tuition cost is a major consideration for many people when making decisions about higher education. According to the AACC, tuition and fees at community colleges average approximately \$2,100. Many community colleges have developed transfer agreements with 4-year institutions, in which the 4-year schools accept community college credits toward a baccalaureate degree. As a result, many students attend community colleges for their freshman and sophomore years before transferring to a 4-year institution of higher education.

COPC and Community Colleges

Like the Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPCs), community colleges work closely with local neighborhoods, governments, and employers to identify, develop, and foster programs and activities that respond to individual needs and help build a stronger society.

COPC grants are awarded to both 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education to develop university-community partnerships that respond to the most urgent needs of urban communities throughout the country. In growing numbers, institutions of higher education are collaborating with community groups to apply research, scholarship,

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Plenty—including tutoring support that contributed to a jump in the reading scores of students at one elementary school from 74th in the state to the top 12, the establishment of a community center, and the creation of two computer centers and a lending library.

“Service learning is another way for us to fulfill our mission,” says Beryl Odom, service-learning coordinator at GSCC. “We’re educating students. We’re giving them practical hands-on experience. And, we’re teaching them to be concerned, caring citizens.”

Determining Residents’ Needs

When GSCC received a 3-year COPC grant in FY 2001, the first action it took was to conduct a needs assessment in two public

housing communities in East Gadsden, where GSCC is located. Working with several churches, the COPC distributed surveys to neighborhood residents. Using the responses of approximately 200 residents, a GSCC instructor had students from a business statistics class perform an analysis. The analysis was used by the COPC to develop a list of continuing education courses and programs that GSCC could offer to the public housing residents, as well as the surrounding community. Because the college wanted to include a service-learning component in its COPC activities, the college then identified ways to involve students in the ongoing community activities.

Helping Schools in Crisis

Since the COPC grant was awarded, GSCC has worked closely with the Oscar Adams Elementary School and the C.A. Donehoo School—two East Gadsden elementary schools that had been on the Alabama department of education’s schools in crisis list. To date, about 43 service-learning students have assisted teachers in the classroom with reading, math, and other activities. In addition, a GSCC instructor trained approximately 15 America Reads tutors who were assigned to the schools.

Within 18 months of offering classroom support, reading scores at both schools had risen. Students at one school moved from 74th in the state in reading to the top 12 in 2004. The principal at the Donehoo School gives much of the credit for the jump in reading scores to

the service-learning students at GSCC and the America Reads tutors, attributing the increase to the individualized attention the students received, according to Odom.

In addition to in-classroom support, GSCC helped supplement the schools’ libraries. The COPC grant allowed several hundred books to be purchased for the Donehoo School.

Creating a Consolidated Community Center

Because community development is a large part of the COPC project goals, GSCC is working to create a consolidated community center that would house the child advocacy center and other community service agencies, including the Family Success Center.

Created through a grant GSCC wrote with the city of Gadsden and the local United Way, the Family Success Center offers classes in anger management and control, parenting, working with teens, and much more. It also provides an educational outreach program on child abuse that visits local schools and presents information through the use of a puppet show. Many service-learning students in human services, sociology, and pre-nursing volunteer at the center.

To make this community center a reality, the city of Gadsden purchased and is in the process of renovating a former department



(Left) James Browning Allen Hall, Gadsden State Community College. (Right) C.A. Donehoo School, an East Gadsden elementary school that received support from GSCC service-learning students.

store. Eventually, the renovated center will bring all of the agencies—which are currently operating in two-bedroom bungalows throughout the neighborhood—under one roof. An Even Start center and an adult education center are located on an adjacent block.

Although building renovation has taken longer than anticipated, Odom is encouraged by other economic development. A few streets away from the planned community center, a new shopping mall containing a Wal-Mart and several other national chain stores opened.

“We’ve worked all along with the city to establish this area as a center for family services,” says Odom. “We’ll have education services and health services, as well as the panoply of community services right there within a block and a half of the college in a kind of one-stop for residents.”

Providing Computer Skills and Books

One of the key findings of the needs assessment conducted by GSCC was that many residents wanted to enhance their computer skills. To help accomplish this goal, GSCC established two small computer centers in the two public housing communities of East Gadsden. Center staff and students from GSCC taught basic computer skills classes and assisted residents with e-mail communications.

“We have many students who major in computer science or technology,” says Odom. “Both public housing communities are nearby. One is 5 minutes from the college; the other is 10 minutes. It’s very easy for the students, even those who commute a long distance to the college, to spend an hour or two once or twice a week helping residents with programs.”

In addition to enhancing computer skills, the COPC also helped to establish a lending library at one of the public housing communities. Through the COPC, bookshelves and library cards were purchased. A book drive was held on campus to gather the initial core collection. The library officially opened on May 4, 2005.

Overcoming the Challenges ...

A successful service-learning program takes a commitment from the learning institution to support such an educational endeavor and

a willingness from the community to participate and serve as an educational proving ground. And while a service-learning program seems like a win-win situation for both sides, there may be some hesitancy for students to participate and community members to welcome the effort. Success comes with overcoming these challenges.

“Initially, selling the community on what we wanted to do was a challenge,” admits Odom. “Our first outreach to 20 churches brought 4 responses, but those 4 have been great to work with. One man told me, ‘This is the first time that GSCC seems to be actually reaching out to the East Gadsden community.’ Now they’re much more amenable and eager to have the service-learning students. We’ve developed additional community partnerships as well.”

Odom advises other schools interested in developing community programs to identify their partners and seek support.

“You can’t do it alone, whether you’re a 2- or 4-year institution,” says Odom.

... And Reaping the Rewards

The results of GSCC’s service-learning program have been overwhelmingly positive. With the program, students are provided with a proving ground for the lessons they learn in the classroom and becoming active in the community at the same time.

“Many of our students are from East Gadsden and already have a vested interest in the community,” says Odom. “The service they give through the COPC programs helps them realize the needs of the community, and many of them have stayed on as volunteers. They now have a sense of commitment, especially the students that worked with the children in the schools.”

The service-learning program is also providing the students with an opportunity to explore different career options.

“We’ve had a few students come to us and say, ‘I just did this because I needed the



GSCC Service-Learning Coordinator Beryl Odom takes a moment to show the new library collection to Wayne East, executive director of the Greater Gadsden Housing Authority.

points for my class, and I never thought I could be a teacher. But I might consider going into education,” says Odom. “Other students have said that the experience was good, but they are going to explore other career paths.”

As for the local community, residents are receiving classes and resources that were not available before the service-learning program was established.

“Community response has been good,” says Odom. “We had a request for a service-learning student from one of the housing communities where we’ve not taught a class before. Our new students begin the summer session in June and I’m sure we’ll be able to fulfill their request.”

According to Odom, community leaders are also pleased with the results of the partnership, and she believes public opinion will further increase with the opening of the new community services center.

“I think the college has much higher visibility now and if we propose some new project, the community will be more receptive to it,” says Odom. “COPC really was our proving ground. East Gadsden is where the needs were greatest. And that’s why the COPC and GSCC mission meshed so beautifully—we’re here to serve the community.”

For additional information about the COPC program and service-learning activities at Gadsden State Community College, contact Beryl Odom, service-learning coordinator, at (256) 549-8386 or via e-mail at bodom@gadsdenstate.edu. ♦

OUP Report Celebrates Community Engagement

What happens when academic institutions make long-term financial and human investments in their local neighborhoods? The answer lies within *The Power of Partnership*, a special anniversary report that chronicles the 10-year evolution of the Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) program, assesses its success in introducing community engagement to academic institutions, and discusses some of the core ingredients for effective campus-community partnerships.

In neighborhoods nationwide, COPC grantees are responding to the most urgent needs of urban communities, providing public service projects and instructional programs, job training and counseling, resident-backed strategies to spur economic growth and reduce crime, youth mentoring programs, and financial and technical assistance for new businesses. *The Power of Partnership* highlights the nationwide impact of the program's initiatives on the individuals who live and work in COPC neighborhoods and honors those who have invested their time and expertise in collaborative efforts to galvanize neighborhood revitalization. It includes compelling personal stories such as these:

- ✿ Hispanic mothers in California receive support to pursue college degrees while participating in an applied research project aimed at finding ways to help other women.
- ✿ A West Philadelphia anthropology professor's urban health initiative changes nutrition-related habits in city schools while simultaneously rejuvenating his own teaching and providing his students the opportunity to put theory into practice.
- ✿ A city official in Rhode Island who relies on a university to do what his city did not have the resources to do—build the capacity of local residents so they could reverse their neighborhood's steady decline.
- ✿ An Illinois graduate student's social work internships give her the skills and confidence she needs to establish a civic association that is working to rid her own neighborhood of crime and drugs.



The report also includes insightful contributions from former OUP directors on issues such as empowering and improving local communities, improving relations between campus and community, and helping HUD fulfill its mission. It also provides a list of COPC grantees from the program's inception to the present.

To view a PDF file of *The Power of Partnership*, visit www.oup.org/pubs/copc10.html. You may obtain a free copy of the publication from the University Partnerships Clearinghouse at (800) 245-2691. ♦

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and service to real-life problems, according to the Office of University Partnerships. They are integrating such partnerships into their curriculum, academic studies, and student activities, making them part of their ongoing mission.

Local Colleges Reach Out

Two community colleges used their COPC grants to reach out to the surrounding communities, develop new partnerships, and work to increase their involvement in the community. These colleges developed wide-ranging programs and activities that address specific community needs.

Gadsden State Community College (GSCC) in Gadsden, Alabama, received a 3-year COPC grant in FY 2001. GSCC works with two local public housing communities, two nearby elementary schools, and local community services organizations to bring much-needed services to the residents of East Gadsden.

Housatonic Community College, which also received a 3-year COPC grant in FY 2001, established programs to train healthcare outreach workers and childcare providers. The Bridgeport, Connecticut, college also works with the city of Bridgeport on affordable housing and homelessness issues.

Future Growth for Community Colleges

With the help of COPC funds, community colleges will continue to expand and grow to meet the needs of their students and communities. Responsive institutions of higher learning play a vital role in the education of today's workforce. The strength of their partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's COPC program will help ensure that the students of today are ready to face the challenges of the future for themselves, their families, and their community. ♦

Housatonic Community College Serves Southwestern Connecticut

Traditionally, healthcare outreach, childcare, homelessness, and affordable housing have been areas considered out of the purview of community colleges. But Housatonic Community College (HCC) in Bridgeport, Connecticut, is using its 2001 COPC grant to deal with these important issues that affect residents of the local community and southwestern Connecticut.

With an enrollment of approximately 4,500 students, many of HCC's students are older, nontraditional, or returning students. The student population is predominantly female, with a large Latino and African-American population. The college has a number of programs, such as criminal justice and human services, that allow people to enter that field with just an associate's degree, but also works with 4-year institutions to help students transfer into baccalaureate programs.

By connecting community issues with educational programs, HCC is not only providing students with diverse course offerings, but it is also providing community members with much-needed support and assistance.

"One of the things we did was to create more opportunities for students to work in the community," says Anthony Ball, director of HCC's COPC. "If you have a degree-granting program, you probably have some kind of practicum opportunity for students. But for students in general studies, behavioral social science, or liberal arts, there are no formal practicum opportunities, so the service-learning programs that we developed under COPC provide opportunities for approximately 30 students to do specific volunteer work in the community each semester."

Many HCC students are already working in careers in the community, but for students coming straight out of high school, Ball notes that two courses—School and Community and Community and Leadership—offer an important opportunity for community volunteer work as part of their classes.

Taking Healthcare to the Community

HCC's healthcare outreach program is designed for people who are frontline, street-level outreach workers, particularly in minority communities. Adapting a curriculum originally designed by the University of California at San Diego, the college has offered training for people already working in the field, a bilingual Spanish-English training, and a third training session open to any interested individuals. The program helps outreach workers to develop the communication skills and cultural competency to outline the healthcare options available to their clients. Workers learn about the healthcare resources available to area residents and how to make referrals and advocate for their clients.

HCC trained 50 to 55 healthcare outreach workers during the 3-year COPC grant. The community health advisers' program recently added a mentoring component that ensures graduates' continuing involvement by having them mentor the students coming after them.

"The COPC program's design makes it easy to create a program with lots of discrete, doable tasks, rather than one giant overarching goal," states Ball. "Try to develop specific, achievable goals. If one of the tasks doesn't come together, you've still got the other pieces."

Developing a National Healthcare Curriculum

HCC is now an adaptive institution of the University of Arizona and received a U.S. Department of Education grant to nationalize the healthcare curriculum for outreach workers.

"The idea is to give people who have only a high school diploma or associate's degree a special credential in healthcare outreach work that could be recognized by employers," Ball explains.

The University of Arizona recently received a Fund for Improvement in Post Secondary Education (FIPSE) grant to review healthcare outreach worker programs like HCC's and develop a national curriculum that would eventually become a degree-granting program. Ball envisions the program moving from noncredit, COPC-funded training toward a credential or certificate and eventually an associate's degree in the next few years.

Training Benefits Childcare Providers and Users

HCC recently completed its third cohort training in childcare accreditation. HCC helps unaccredited childcare providers to get National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation. A childcare provider seeking NAEYC accreditation must have a certain percentage of teachers with a child development associate (CDA) credential or higher. Housatonic's program serves two purposes: to provide employment training and to build childcare capacity in Bridgeport.

The CDA credential is an entry-level credential and not an academic degree. The minimum requirement is a high school diploma or GED. CDA training includes 180 hours of substantive childcare information, supplemented by additional work in soft skills and basic education skills.

"Many times a student will earn the CDA and want to go on for an associate's degree, but they need basic English and math skills to do that," Ball says. "We help provide the additional education skills they need."

Bridgeport Faces Homelessness and Housing Issues

"We've done a lot more in housing than we had anticipated when we applied for the COPC grant," says Ball. The COPC works with the Continuum of Care and is the regional coordinator for the Continuum of Care's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). This system, funded under a separate HUD grant, allows providers of homeless services to track client outcomes, expedite referrals, and facilitate transitions to mainstream benefits, such as Social Security Disability and Medicaid.

In January 2005, the COPC participated in a regional Point-in-Time Survey as part of a national HUD-mandated survey to record the demographics and assess the needs of Southwest Connecticut's homeless population. A single, user-friendly form was developed for the survey, which was conducted on January 26. In addition to counting people who use shelter/housing services offered by participating agencies, volunteers also worked to identify the unsheltered (street) homeless population. Because the Point-in-Time Survey helps determine funding levels for HUD-sponsored programs, an accurate tally aids area service providers in obtaining adequate federal support to meet their clients' needs. HCC students helped to distribute and collect the survey forms and enter data into HMIS to provide readily available, current information to service providers.

The COPC has become more involved with the city of Bridgeport because of the need to develop an affordable housing strategy at the same time that local municipalities are trying to develop a strategy to end chronic homelessness. Both activities have become a major component of COPC programs.

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"We're losing housing stock," says Ball. "There's been a diminution of public housing, and affordability has become a real issue. Bridgeport is one of the last places in southwest Connecticut with affordable housing and affluent people come here and bid up prices on housing. Bridgeport was an industrial town and, in addition to job loss over the years, we continue to see higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. We have brown-fields issues because of the factories that left town, and we're dealing with terrible land use that has housing located next to chrome manufacturing facilities. There are all kinds of major issues that need to be resolved."

Increasing HCC's Community Presence

Community reaction to the COPC and its programs has been positive. The COPC receives many requests for information, assistance with grant writing, or assistance with incorporation.

According to Ball, most of the neighborhoods have community councils with which HCC works. HCC assists these councils with capacity building or acquiring 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. In addition, HCC has worked with groups, such as Groundwork Bridgeport, to do neighborhood cleanup and environmental activities. Many students are assigned to neighborhood partners, a tactic that has proven effective in keeping partners involved.

"Once you establish what the COPC is and isn't, collaborations tend to go pretty well," says Ball. "People will call us and say, 'We had a great student last semester. Are you going to be able to give us a student this semester?' They understand that we have faculty members and student volunteers with expertise in certain areas and that we can help them with information gathering."

How the community views HCC has changed dramatically, according to Ball. HCC is now seen as being capable of doing community-based research and working with organizations in a way that people have traditionally associated with 4-year institutions.

COPC Partners Assist Programs

Ball credits several community partners with helping the Housatonic COPC achieve its goals. The Greater Bridgeport Area Foundation runs the Nonprofit Resource Center, which conducts many workshops in coordination with the COPC. The Southwest Area Health Education Center assisted the COPC with the community healthcare outreach worker training. Charts the Course funds the last module of the CDA training and certifies that the CDA training has been conducted according to standards.

Recommendations for Replication

Ball recommends getting faculty commitment from the outset, explaining that the passion and expertise of faculty members who will be teaching the classes determines the success of the programs.

"Community colleges are not research institutions," says Ball. "We do some types of community-based research now, which is great, but our strengths are in our students, many of whom come from the communities we serve. We're accessible and open to the public. Play to your strengths."

For more information, contact Anthony Ball, director, Housatonic Community College COPC, at (203) 332-5170, e-mail: ABall@hcc.commnet.edu. ♦