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## Community College National Center for Community Engagement Accent on Student Success: Engaged Together for Service (ASSETS) Initiative Report

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**Community College National Center for Community Engagement  
Accent on Student Success: Engaged Together for Service  
(ASSETS) Initiative**

**(Learn and Serve America Higher Education Grant  
Corporation for National and Community Service)**

**June 2007**

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**Introduction:**

This report is the first year of data findings (of a three year grant project) involving nine of the ten community colleges (one college did not submit data) who received funding from the Community College National Center for Community Engagement through a Learn and Serve America Higher Education grant as part of the Corporation for National and Community Service in an effort to expand the field of service-learning and civic engagement in diverse communities nationwide. The grant is intended to address two dimensions of this effort: 1) training and technical assistance; and 2) facilitation of sub-grantee projects in meeting community needs. This report focuses on data gathered as part of the second dimension in 4 pre-identified categories of college-community projects: a) Baby Boomers; b) Disadvantaged Youth; c) Homeland Security/Domestic Preparedness; and d) Start-up Service-Learning.

Specifically, the ASSETS grant is intended to: develop an intergenerational approach of service through projects that incorporate baby boomers, K-12, and community college students; promote academic and civic engagement opportunities for disadvantaged youth by engaging middle and high school students in service-learning projects in their communities; support previous LSAHE grantee work on service-learning homeland security projects; and facilitate professional development to all sub-grantee colleges, but especially those initiating service-learning courses and programs.

### **Performance Measure Goals:**

This report focuses on three of the performance measure goals:

1) College students participating in the service-learning activities will demonstrate an improved attitude toward learning for academic engagement. Specifically, by year three of the grant, 75% of college service-learning students will indicate an improved attitude towards learning for academic engagement as reported on a survey.

2) College students participating in the service-learning activities will demonstrate an increased interest in community service after college. Specifically, by year three of the grant, 75% of college service-learning students will indicate interest in continuing community service after the project and/or after graduation as reported on a survey.

3) Community partner agencies working collaboratively with Homeland Security/Emergency Preparedness sub-grantee colleges will report that the ASSETS grant had an impact on education preparedness. Specifically, by year three of the grant, 60% of the partner agencies will report that ASSETS service-learning projects improved community awareness of homeland security/emergency preparedness as reported on a survey.

### **Survey Development:**

In collaboration with grant directors at the ten institutions, two surveys were developed to measure performance goals. Emphasis was placed upon creating surveys that could be easily administered, efficiently completed, and quickly tallied while accurately measuring dimensions of the core concepts of interest.

The College Student Survey, in an attempt to measure “*improved attitude towards learning for academic engagement*”, contained seven items which students were asked to rate on a Likert-type scale (1-4) from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Students were requested as a result of their participation in the service-learning experience to rate their level of: 1) increased understanding of their knowledge and skills to improve the community; 2) increased understanding of how

to use course readings and information to gain insight into community issues; 3) increased understanding of how their college education can benefit themselves and the community; 4) increased likelihood to complete their college degree; 5) increased likelihood to involve themselves in community service in the future; 6) increased capacity to become a community leader; and 7) increased capacity to create positive community change. The college student survey also included some basic demographic questions: gender; race/ethnicity, and year in school. Institutions that collected the data also indicated whether the service-learning was conducted as part of a course, single experience (e.g., MLK day), or extended service-learning experience (e.g., Alternative Spring Break).

The Community Partner Survey, in an attempt to measure “*impact on education preparedness for homeland security/emergency preparedness*”, contained 5 items which partners were asked to rate on a Likert-type scale (1-4) from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Partners at community agencies were requested as a result of their collaboration with the service-learning college to rate their level of agreement with the following statements: 1) I felt that the students were committed to improved community emergency preparedness; 2) I felt that I contributed to student learning about community needs; 3) I felt valued by the faculty for knowledge and expertise; 4) I felt that the service-learning project contributed to improving community emergency preparedness; and 5) I would be willing to participate again in another service-learning partnership.

### **Results:**

Since this was the initial year of the grant, data were collected only for the Spring 2007 term.

#### **College Student Survey:**

288 college students who participated in service-learning activities completed the survey including 107 males and 171 females (others did not respond to demographic items). Of these, 33% are first year students, 36% 2<sup>nd</sup> year students, 20% 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, 6% 4<sup>th</sup> year students, and 1% 5<sup>th</sup> year students (note that since these are community college students, many attend part-time to earn their degree and

thus even a 5<sup>th</sup> year student may still only have the equivalent credits of a “sophomore”).

Race/ethnicity representation includes: White = 93; Asian/Pacific Islander = 41; Black/African American = 27; American Indian = 87; Hispanic/Latino = 21; Multiracial = 3. (It should be noted that this is one of the largest datasets known for service-learning on perspectives of American Indian students.)

Of the total survey respondents, 61% were in a service-learning course and 28% in an extended service-learning experience.

College student responses to the survey items indicate overwhelming project success with respect to improving student attitudes towards “*learning for academic engagement*”. Nine out of ten college students agreed that as a result of their service-learning experience they increased their:

1. understanding of how their college education can benefit both themselves and society (92.3%)
2. understanding of how to use their knowledge and skills to improve the community (90.7%)
3. understanding of how to use course readings and information to gain insight into community issues (89.8%)
4. likelihood of completing their college degree (87.6%)

In addition, college students reported that the service-learning experiences significantly *enhanced their civic capacity* (their ability to demonstrate leadership in the community in creating positive change). Specifically, a significant majority of the students reported that as a result of their service-learning experience they increased their:

1. capacity to create positive community change (86.4%)
2. likelihood of involving themselves in community service in the future (85.6%)
3. capacity to become a community leader (80.3%)

Moreover, each of the four facets of the ASSETS grant initiatives demonstrated success.

a) **Baby Boomers:** Over 90% of college students who participated in these service-learning experiences reported that they increased their understanding of how their college education can benefit both themselves and society; understanding of how to use their knowledge and skills to improve the community; understanding of how to use course readings and information to gain insight into community issues; likelihood of completing their college degree; and increased their capacity for creating positive community change. In addition, over 80% of the students indicated that have an increased likelihood of involving themselves in community service in the future and the capacity to become a community leader.

b) **Disadvantaged Youth:** Over 90% of colleges students who participated in these service-learning experiences reported enhanced growth and development on all 7 survey items.

c) **Homeland Security/Domestic Preparedness:** Over 90% of colleges students who participated in these service-learning experiences reported enhanced growth and development on all 7 survey items.

d) **Start-up Service-Learning:** The data indicate overwhelming project success. At one institution (with fewer respondents) 100% of the students indicated enhanced growth and development on all 7 survey items. At the other two institutions, over 80% of the college students agreed on all survey items that their academic learning for engagement and civic capacity improved as a result of participating in the service-learning experience.

#### **Community Partner Survey:**

Those institutions with a focus on Homeland Security/Domestic Preparedness were also required to distribute a survey to their community partners. Only 2 of the 3 institutions provided data. Also, the data set (as to be expected) was quite small representing the perspectives of 8 community partners.

The goal of the survey was an attempt to measure “*impact on education preparedness for homeland security/emergency preparedness*”, from the view of the

community. Results indicate that 100% of partners at community agencies, as a result of their collaboration with the service-learning college, agreed that:

- 1) students were committed to improving community emergency preparedness;
- 2) they contributed to student learning about community needs;
- 3) they felt valued by the faculty for their knowledge and expertise;
- 4) they felt that the service-learning project contributed to improving community emergency preparedness;
- 5) they would be willing to participate again in another service-learning partnership.

**Summary:**

The first year of the ASSETS grant initiative was extremely successful. College students who participated in the service-learning projects evidenced an *improved attitude in learning for academic engagement*. Similarly, community partners reported that students had a very positive *impact on education preparedness for homeland security/emergency preparedness*. Certainly, the ASSETS initiative has in its first year already demonstrated a significant accomplishment in providing new learning opportunities for college students and a positive impact on a wide variety of communities across the United States.