

Enriched & Inspired

Service Pathways
To College Success



Supported by the
Corporation for National
and Community Service
through its special initiative,
*Engaging Persons with
Disabilities in National
and Community Service*



Lynn Barnett and Carol Jeandron
with Madeline Patton

A report from Project Reach: Service Inclusion for
Students with Disabilities
American Association of Community Colleges

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The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's community colleges. The association represents 1,200 two-year, associate degree-granting institutions and more than 11 million students. AACC promotes community colleges through five strategic action areas: recognition and advocacy for community colleges; student access, learning, and success; community college leadership development; economic and workforce development; and global and intercultural education. Information about AACC and community colleges may be found at www.aacc.nche.edu.

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*“I am enriched and inspired to not give up,
resist feeling hopeless and committed
to not allowing my circumstance or situation
to define who I am or what I could become with help.”*

— Anna Taylor, El Camino College student enrolled in
an assistive technology course, writing in a reflection paper
about her service learning experience

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Preface

Facing national calls for higher rates of achievement for all students—and for students in underrepresented groups in particular—community colleges and other institutions of higher education are re-thinking some of the reasons that many students slip through the cracks. Recent research calls attention to the importance of student engagement for student success and national leaders are raising public awareness about the value of community service. The combined focus on academic success and student engagement through service learning and community service makes this report a timely one. Students with disabilities represent a segment of those students who may be overlooked.

Community colleges serve a larger proportion of students with disabilities than any other segment of postsecondary education. This publication provides a picture of efforts undertaken by 14 community colleges to engage students with disabilities in service. The colleges expanded or revised existing service learning programs; they also explored new ways to reach out to students who were already on their campuses, but who had not been offered the full range of engagement opportunities enjoyed by their peers.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is grateful for the opportunity provided by a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The CNCS special initiative, Engaging Persons with Disabilities in National and Community Service, provided funding for the groundbreaking work undertaken in AACC's

Project Reach: Service Inclusion for Students with Disabilities. The Corporation is to be commended for bringing attention to the need for meaningful service opportunities for students with disabilities.

AACC is indebted to the presidents, faculty, disability support service staff, community partners, and the mentor team who contributed to Project Reach. Special appreciation is extended to Barbara Baird, Janie Beverley, Meg Burnley, Nancilynn Burruss, Geralin Clark, Jennifer Conway, Joy Cook, Alex Crittenden, Chris Daniel, Valerie De Angelis, Paul Edwards, Robert Exley, Karen Franklin, Dale Hill, Amy Johnson, Nancy Johnson, Amy Langley, Jane Larson, Oscar Lopez, Kim McNeel, Tom Murphy, Garo Papazian, Dipte Patel, Tamica Ramos, Esther Schon, Frances Villagran-Glover, Sam Weiner, Mary Kay Wurm, and AACC staff members Robin Allen, Quintin Doromal, Courtney Larson, Gail Robinson, and Faith San Felice.

Most importantly, AACC offers thanks to the inspirational students who met new challenges, encouraged their peers, became new leaders, and shared their stories. This book would not have been possible without them.

George R. Boggs

President and CEO

American Association of Community Colleges

August 2009

Introduction

The American Association of Community Colleges has had a longstanding interest in students with disabilities and in student engagement in service learning as a way to help community college students to succeed academically while contributing to their communities.

With support from the U.S. Department of Education and advice from an external panel of experts, AACC published a book that described disability support practices and programs designed to help community college students with disabilities reach their fullest potential. The book included information on general disability support services as well as particular programs that supported students with specific disabilities such as learning disabilities, and those targeted to specific categories such as vocational training (Barnett 1993). The book was an outgrowth of a 1992 survey of college programs, and was followed in 1996 with a second survey of community college disability support programs. (See *Survey of Disability Support Services in Community Colleges*, page 2.)

In 1994 AACC initiated a new program that became known as Community Colleges Broadening Horizons through Service Learning, with support from the Learn and Serve America program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). With 15 years of continuous support from Learn and Serve America, the network has grown to 70 Horizons colleges that have placed 29,000 students conducting 466,000 hours of direct community service (a monetary value of \$9.4 million); worked with more than 2,000 community college faculty; and affected

more than 5,000 local agencies and schools and more than 600,000 individuals.

It was within this context that AACC applied for and received funding from 2005 to 2009 through a CNCS special initiative, Engaging Persons with Disabilities in National and Community Service. With CNCS support, AACC selected 14 community colleges to become part of a new program, Project Reach: Service Inclusion for Students with Disabilities. The goal was to introduce, strengthen, or expand programs to provide service learning and service opportunities for students with disabilities. Four disability support specialists from other community colleges formed the Project Reach mentor team that helped guide the program's progress.

In 2008, eight of the colleges explored ways to engage veterans and students in developmental education courses. Students who participated in Project Reach gained opportunities to learn life skills to help with employment, careers, and personal development—the requirements of the grants—but many reported meaningful life changes as well. Personal experiences of students grounded the colleges' work. This report describes briefly the students who participated and then reviews the types of strategies colleges employed to engage students, particularly those who may be out of the mainstream.

Survey of Disability Support Services in Community Colleges

Approximately 45% of undergraduates with disabilities are enrolled at public two-year institutions, according to National Postsecondary Student Aid Study data (NCES, 2008). The American Association of Community Colleges conducted a national survey in 1996 with support from the U.S. Department of Education to gather information about students with disabilities and the range of disability support services in community colleges. That report found that only half of the community college students who reported having a disability used disability support services (Barnett 1996).

AACC conducted a similar survey in 2006 whose objective was to update the earlier information about staffing, services, and activities related to students with disabilities. Unfortunately, it garnered a disappointingly low response rate. Researchers surmised that the lack of a single point of contact at colleges for collecting data about students with disabilities could be the reason for the low response rate to the online survey. Although the findings from the survey were not statistically significant, some insights about staffing, services, and activities were gained from the institutions that participated in the survey.

The 2006 survey showed that some community colleges were creatively meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents reported having a dedicated office for disability support services; colleges without a dedicated office averaged only 2 FTE staff to support students with disabilities.

The top five disability categories for which community colleges reported services were

- learning disabilities
- emotional or psychiatric conditions
- orthopedic or mobility impairments
- attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and
- health impairments.

The most commonly reported accommodations and services provided by community colleges were

academic counseling, note takers/scribes/ readers, testing accommodations, alternative media, and tutoring services.

Other disabilities reported in smaller numbers fell into the categories of developmental disabilities, deaf/hard of hearing, blind/visually impaired, and brain injury. Speech and language impairments, HIV/AIDS, and autism spectrum disorders were the least frequently reported categories of disability.

National data trends show that the reporting of learning disabilities grew significantly in the 1990s. Of those surveyed by AACC, the average number of students registered for a college's disability support services in that category was 111, twice as many as the other categories. The accommodations noted above reflect a concentration of resources for learning disabilities.

National data trends also show that students with disabilities are most commonly found in two-year institutions and in recent years completion rates for community college students with disabilities have increased from 11% in 2003 to 16% in 2007 (NCES 2004, NCES 2008).

The AACC survey respondents emphasized the crucial need for partnerships within the community, especially with high schools, rehabilitation centers, and vocational education institutions. The types of disability support activities most frequently reported were related to recruitment, academic success, and post-collegiate goals. Colleges noted needs for faculty and staff training on compliance with regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, transition services from high school to college, and increased disability awareness within the community.

Sources:

National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). *National postsecondary student aid study 2003–04*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education. Available from the Data Analysis System Web site, <http://www.nces.ed.gov/das>.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2008). *National postsecondary student aid study 2007–08*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education. Available from the Data Analysis System Web site, <http://www.nces.ed.gov/das>.

FIGURE 1.**Project Reach Colleges, 2005-2009****Anne Arundel Community College**

101 College Parkway
Arnold, MD 21012-1895
<http://www.aacc.edu>
<http://www.aacc.edu/servicelearning/>

Big Sandy Community and Technical College

One Bert T. Combs Drive
Prestonsburg, KY 41653
<http://bigandy.kctcs.edu>

Brevard Community College

1519 Clearlake Road
Cocoa, FL 32922-6597
<http://www.brevardcc.edu>
http://www.brevardcc.edu/index.cfmmainframe=soar/content/&subnavframe=soar/content/sub_nav.html

Central Piedmont Community College

PO Box 35009
Charlotte, NC 28235
<http://www.cpcc.edu>
<http://www.cpcc.edu/service-learning>
http://www.cpcc.edu/student_life/events/walk-a-mile-in-my-shoes

Edmonds Community College

20000 68th Avenue West
Lynnwood, WA 98036
<http://www.edcc.edu>
<http://www.edcc.edu/amerikorps/>
http://www.edcc.edu/stulife/clubs/rolling_tritons.php

El Camino College

16007 Crenshaw Boulevard
Torrance, CA 90506
<http://www.elcamino.edu>

Henderson Community College

2660 South Green Street
Henderson, KY 42420
<http://www.hencc.kctcs.edu>

Miami Dade College

300 NE 2nd Avenue
Miami, FL 33132
<http://www.mdc.edu/home/>
<http://www.mdc.edu/wolfson/student/access/SpecialProjects/ProjectReach.asp>
<http://www.mdc.edu/cc>

Minneapolis Community and Technical College

1501 Hennepin Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403
<http://www.minneapolis.edu>

Mount Wachusett Community College

444 Green Street
Gardner, MA 01440
<http://www.mwcc.mass.edu>

Northern Virginia Community College

4001 Wakefield Chapel Road
Annandale, VA 22003
<http://www.nvcc.edu>

National Park Community College

101 College Drive
Hot Springs, AR 71913
<http://www.npcc.edu>

Prairie State College

202 South Halsted Street
Chicago Heights, IL 60411
<http://www.prairiestate.edu>

Snead State Community College

220 North Walnut Street
Boaz, AL 35957
<http://www.snead.edu>

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Student Engagement Through Service

The CNCS special initiative, Engaging Persons with Disabilities in National and Community Service, reflects timely issues in higher education: concerns about equity, access to educational opportunity, and college achievement that leads to meaningful employment. A focus on service inclusion demands attention to all of these issues.

Student Engagement

Results of the national Community College Survey of Student Engagement and other research show that a student's ability to connect with others is a strong predictor of college success (McClenney & Marti 2006). Recent studies also document the effect of service learning on student engagement. Research supported by the Learn and Serve America program of the CNCS (Prentice & Robinson 2007) reported that even first-time service learning students scored statistically significantly higher on participatory citizenship; previous studies revealed a positive connection between service learning and student retention (Prentice, Robinson, & McPhee 2003).

Not all students engage easily. Faculty and staff who work closely with students with disabilities are familiar with their hesitancy to participate with people beyond their personal circles or comfort levels. They probably have good reason if they previously have experienced roadblocks or felt unwelcome. This is true, of course, for any student.



As part of his coursework, Will Whobrey reads to children in a Head Start classroom at Henderson Community College in Kentucky. At Henderson he used skills gained in an Employability Skills course and was hired to tutor young children at a local church. After earning his associate degree, Whobrey transferred to Western Kentucky University to major in elementary education. The books purchased through Project Reach continue to support the Head Start program, where Henderson students in developmental education courses now read to the children.

Courtesy of Henderson Community College Head Start Program

Students aged 18 or older must voluntarily disclose their disability status to receive college support services related to their disability; many choose privacy over services. That choice may affect the degree to which a student engages with others at the college and in the community. In spite of recent research that shows a relationship between student engagement and success in college, personal choices made by students with disabilities may be limiting their own opportunities. This is likely for students with disabilities that are not readily apparent, such as learning disabilities or autism, but may be especially true for those who do not seek support services. Compounding the engagement challenge is the fact that some students who openly seek disability support services may still find themselves in a fairly closed circle of friends and supporters.

Project Reach faculty described their experiences as they watched their students with disabilities—accustomed to being on the receiving end of service—for the first time becoming the givers of service. Their sense of empowerment and self-confidence was palpable. “No one ever asked me [to serve] before,” one student said. One Project Reach director summed it up this way: “This . . . allowed young people the dignity of taking personal risk and challenging themselves.”

First-time service learners approached service learning from different perspectives. It appealed to them because of previous positive experiences as a volunteer, because the service option of a course was “exciting,” because it substituted for a final exam, because it connected them to a career goal such as working with children, or because it simply inspired them. One student participating in a focus group said, “What interested me the most is that I have found an opportunity to make an impact on someone’s life. This is really important to me.”

Project Reach enabled students to engage in service areas of personal interest, from sports and

activities with youth to careful environmental restoration tasks and job fairs for veterans. Most community agencies and other service sites had not

Compounding the engagement challenge is the fact that some students who openly seek disability support services may still find themselves in a fairly closed circle of friends and supporters.

worked with students with disabilities before, but found simple solutions for accommodating special needs. One agency purchased magnifying glasses for a student; another built a special workhorse so a student could cut lumber from his wheelchair.



Jeremy Grisham, field coordinator for the Veterans Conservation Corps, led a work project at the Auburn Environmental Park in Auburn, Washington, in July 2009. In his work with veterans, Grisham used strategies he learned as a student in Learn-n-serve Environmental Anthropology Field (LEAF) School, a Project Reach-supported initiative at Edmonds Community College.

Courtesy of Veterans Conservation Corps

Meeting Community Needs

Service that meets community needs is a critical component of the CNCS philosophy of service inclusion for all students. Community college students in the Project Reach colleges met that challenge through traditional and new approaches. For many students with disabilities, long accustomed to relying on various service providers, this opportunity to serve others was new. Their ability to assist others in ways

that made a difference to their communities was eye-opening.

The most prevalent community needs centered on education and environmental issues, although faculty and students identified other needs that aligned with course requirements or personal interests, such as literacy or inmate transitions. Sometimes students met unforeseen needs. One student thought her service placement in a nursing home was not the

FIGURE 2. Enriched and Inspired: Student Voices on Engagement

- "I like the opportunity to get different perspectives. [Service learning] seems so real, rather than learning about it in a textbook. I enjoy being with real people."
- "What interested me the most is that I have found an opportunity to make an impact on someone's life. This is really important to me."
- "I get to be a mentor [to a wheelchair basketball club], seeing them as a part of a team, not outcasts."
- "Nobody can do everything but everyone can do something."
- "It is appealing to me to see other students go to different service-learning sites . . . I help do workshops with faculty and community agencies. I get the feeling that I get to help out."
- "I like the service-learning activities that make a major impact on people, especially those that inspire people to do better with their lives."
- "The more I help others succeed, the more I succeed myself."
- "It showed me that no one should be exempt from kindness. It helped me to see the beauty of grace. It helped me realize how prideful I am and how judgmental I am."
- "Volunteering was a new experience for me, and it has changed the way I feel about getting out, being proactive with my life, and helping others. . . It has changed me. "
- "You experience it, take something out of it, and apply it to the rest of your life."
- "I want to make changes, not just for ourselves, but for society as a whole."

Sources: Focus group discussions, college progress reports, interviews, and reflection papers of community college students participating in Project Reach, 2005-2009

best fit with her personal or career interests until she realized that her own sign language skills could ease an elderly deaf resident's social isolation.

One college partnered with more than 100 non-profit programs. Almost one-third were faith based, several were AmeriCorps projects, and many were K-12 or pre-school programs. One instructor gave students a list of agencies from which to choose their placement sites. The organizations were grouped into

four categories: hunger and homelessness, education and youth, animals and the environment, and health. Many instructors required students to leave something of value with the agency that could be used again, such as brochures (some translated into other languages), videos, DVDs, computer programs, or organizational charts.

FIGURE 3. Examples of Courses with Service Learning Offerings

Accounting	Developmental Math	Gerontology	Radiology Technology
Agricultural Technology	Developmental Reading	Graphic Design	Recreation Leadership
Anthropology	Diversity Studies	History	Respiratory Therapy
Arabic	Early Childhood Development	Human Development	Sign Language
Biology	Ecosystem Ecology	Information Technology	Social and Human Service
Business	Educational Development	Job Development	Sociology
Career Development	Elementary Education	Political Science	Speech
Child Development	Employability Skills	Materials Science Technology	Visual Communications
Collision Repair	English	Medical Technology	Working with People with Disabilities
Communication	English as a Second Language	Music	
Construction	Environmental Science	Nursing	
Criminal Justice	Freshman Orientation	Philosophy	
Death and Dying	Geography	Physical Therapy	
Dental Hygiene		Political Science	
Developmental English		Psychology	

Source: Project Reach progress reports, 2006-2009

College Strategies

The Project Reach colleges served an array of students, including full-time and part-time college students, high school students considering college for the first time, and veterans entering or returning to college after military service. Strategies used by the colleges are categorized broadly here as service learning and service opportunities, transition to work, creating a supportive institutional climate, service inclusion in developmental education courses, and outreach to veterans.

Service Learning and Service Opportunities

AACC defines service learning as the combination of classroom instruction with community service, focusing on critical, reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility. Service learning programs involve students in activities that address local, community-identified needs while developing their academic skills and commitment to their community (Gottlieb & Robinson 2006).

Students who participated in Project Reach reported hearing about service learning from traditional organizational sources, such as academic advisors, faculty, and staff. They cited the power of word-of-mouth information and recommendations

from family members who had previously taken a service learning course.

Service Learning Courses

Faculty who use service learning as a teaching method are careful to ensure that students' service in the community relates directly to meeting their academic objectives in the classroom.

Faculty must be sure that their curricula and course syllabi clearly show the correlation between the course work and the service. They may make minor adjustments or extensive changes, or they may decide to create a new course altogether. Whatever the strategy, faculty at Project Reach colleges increased the number of courses offering

Faculty who use service learning as a teaching method are careful to ensure that students' service in the community relates directly to meeting their academic objectives in the classroom.

service learning components. At El Camino College in California a service learning component around the theme of homelessness was included in a developmental-level reading course. Service learning can be incorporated into almost any course, as evidenced by the disciplines represented in Figure 3. Examples of service that students provided are shown in Figure 4.

Group and “One-Shot” Service Opportunities

An early lesson from Project Reach was that students with disabilities, who may have low self-confidence

and rarely are offered service learning options, are hesitant to participate alone at a community service site for the first time. “One-shot” service learning class projects and co-curricular service opportunities appear to be effective transition strategies to improve the comfort level of these students. Project Reach colleges included students with disabilities in both kinds of service.

The Walk a Mile in My Shoes program at Central Piedmont Community College in North Carolina is an example of a campus-wide, co-curricular activity that promotes awareness of disability issues while also providing a venue for students in allied health

FIGURE 4. Examples of Student Service to Their Communities					
Education	Environment	Health Care	Social Services	Veterans	Youth
Adult literacy tutoring	Clean-up and beautification	Hospice care	Bilingual services	Job expo	After-school activities
Book drive	Conservation	Nursing home services	Disaster preparedness	Oral histories	Child care
Classroom assistance	Recycling and e-cycling		Growing food for food banks	Presentation skills	Coaching soccer team for youth with disabilities
Databases and web page development	Salmon habitat restoration		Home building	Resume writing	Powwow support
Head Start assistance	Tree planting		Hurricane relief		Special Olympics
Mentoring	Wildlife monitoring		Inmate transitions		Wheelchair basketball club
Presentations about college to high school students	Working in mammal nurseries		Services to homeless		
Rotating art exhibits					
Tutoring					
Source: Progress reports from Project Reach community colleges, 2005-2009					



As students at Edmonds Community College, Kacie Nelson and Jeremy Grisham planted native species within dredge spoils on Jetty Island to control invasive plants. Grisham became a Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) leader at Green River Community College and other Western Washington colleges. His VCC programs emulate the Learn-n-serve Environmental Anthropology Field (LEAF) School at Edmonds.

programs, such as physical therapy, to demonstrate the skills they are learning.

Students with disabilities at Brevard Community College in Florida participated in a “workday” at Harmony Farms, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals with disabilities through interaction with horses. Students said that they learned they could accomplish more than they thought they could before their service at Harmony Farms.

Other kinds of co-curricular or “one-shot” service activities include the disability awareness days hosted by many colleges as well as events such as job fairs, book drives, “prom nights” at senior centers, and recreational events for children.

Professional Development

The college faculty, staff, and affiliated community partners that provide service

placement sites are key to student success. Because their knowledge about service learning often varies from novice to expert, as does their experience working with students with disabilities, professional development is important for them.

Orientation meetings, brown bag lunches, and special workshops provide opportunities for training and professional development at most colleges. An event at Mount Wachusett Community College in Massachusetts included opportunities for faculty and staff to learn more about what it is like living with disabilities in today’s society and the educational roadblocks that students face. Edmonds Community College in Washington, El Camino College in California, and Prairie State College in Illinois offered summer faculty training sponsored through a center for service learning or an academic affairs division.

El Camino’s seven-hour training sessions introduced faculty to service learning concepts, best practices, and templates to use in shaping their own courses. Each new faculty member also was assigned a mentor for ongoing individualized support. Subsequent training was followed by several get-togethers during the semester to discuss progress, troubleshoot difficulties, provide encouragement, and share challenges and rewards. The training and follow-up sessions built a strong faculty cohort on campus.

A service learning workshop at Brevard Community College for students, faculty, staff, and community partners was organized to provide information on accommodations and inclusion strategies for students with disabilities. Subsequent

“Attitude is everything. If [the service] is really helpful to [the community], we can work past this. Never give up.”

— Student comment during a Project Reach focus group discussion

Walk a Mile in My Shoes Program Expands with Project Reach Support

"When a student actually says, 'Gee, I could be that person in that chair' . . . all of a sudden it's like they're seeing people with disabilities as real people rather than people you look away from," said Alice Carnes of the disability simulations that are part of the Walk a Mile In My Shoes program at Central Piedmont Community College. Carnes is a disability counselor at the college in Charlotte, North Carolina.

To help more students experience these "aha" moments the college used its Project Reach grant to expand its Walk a Mile in My Shoes program to four regional campuses where 313 students participated in 2009. Approximately 500 students participate in the program each year at the college's central campus.

Walk a Mile in My Shoes participants are outfitted with a disability they pick from a hat, which simulates the randomness of injuries, illnesses, and birth defects. Organizers remind participants that people with disabilities do not choose which one they want. Some students receive blindfolds, others get ear plugs, and some must use wheelchairs. Others have their arms placed in slings and weights attached to their ankles to simulate stroke injuries.

Paper eye glasses that simulate vision impairments and other equipment purchased with Project Reach support were used at all the campuses for stations where students who could not commit to the daylong simulation could briefly



Courtesy of Central Piedmont Community College

A physical therapy assistant student (left) gives instructions for operating the wheelchair to Patrick Vellia, a student who is deaf and blind. An interpreter signs the instructions into Vellia's hand before he begins the simulation of a mobility injury during the Walk a Mile in My Shoes program at Central Piedmont Community College.

experience what it is like to have dyslexia or serious vision impairments. All participants were asked to reflect on the simulations and share their experiences during debriefing activities.

Central Piedmont Community College shared its new equipment with Gaston College and Queens University of Charlotte when those institutions launched their own versions of the Walk a Mile program in 2009. Several Project Reach colleges also plan to implement the Walk a Mile program.

service learning workshops added a panel presentation by students with disabilities. Northern Virginia Community College in Virginia offered disability awareness workshops for faculty and administrators and sponsored a Disability Awareness Week.

Some colleges hold "meet and greet" sessions or schedule regular breakfast meetings to exchange information with their community partners. By

clarifying roles and responsibilities and identifying problems before they escalate, these events can help ensure the optimal experience for the service learners. As one Project Reach student noted in a focus group discussion, "Attitude is everything. If [the service] is really helpful to [the community], we can work past this. Never give up."

Some organizations conducted site accessibility reviews and training sessions for staff. A focus group

that included community partners from Habitat for Humanity, a local office of vocational rehabilitation, an independent living center, and a public school revealed their ready willingness to work with

students to make appropriate accommodations. Some accommodations were relatively simple, such as finding a table high enough to be used by someone in a wheelchair. One agency saw that a student needed an FM system for her hearing impairment. Another made sure a student who was blind received orientation training to enable him to use public transportation to the placement site and to enter and exit its facilities. The community partner said, “We had to make sure he had obtained a good mobility orientation program in order for him to have a successful service learning experience.”

Courtesy of Central Piedmont Community College



Bob Tesar, graphic design instructor and quadrilateral amputee, talks with Central Piedmont Community College students and answers their questions about his disability and his prosthetics.

Community Engagement

Community partners welcomed the chance to work more closely with the colleges. They expressed the most satisfaction when the needs of all partners and students were met, including receiving information about how best to accommodate a student’s disability needs. Advance planning and clarity about purpose and roles were important.

Focus group respondents from several community agencies and organizations gave examples of how the service learners assisted

FIGURE 5. Examples of Community Partners

Adopt-A-Stream Foundation	Fort Meade Outreach Center	Jackson House Food Bank	Veterans Conservation Corps
AmeriCorps	Great River Greening	Mid-America Science Museum	Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services
Arkansas Game Commission	Habitat for Humanity	National Naval Medical Center	Vision Loss Resources, Inc.
The Armed Forces Foundation	Harmony Farms, Inc.	Phoenix Therapeutic Services, Inc.	Walter Reed Army Medical Center
Boys and Girls Clubs	Head Start	Shake-a-Leg Foundation	Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Minnesota
Courage Center	High schools	Special Olympics	
Elementary schools	Hire Heroes USA		
	Hope Chapel		

Sources: Project Reach college progress reports, focus groups, and responses to AACC queries

Big Sandy Students Reach Out to High School Students

Talking before an audience for the first time was a key part of **Reggie D. Scott's** transformative freshman year at Big Sandy Community and Technical College in Kentucky.

Scott helped plan two daylong college programs for high school students and was a panelist for the college's Transition Fair in October 2008. More than 170 high school students with disabilities attended the fair; most returned in spring 2009 for the Café Project, a career awareness event designed with Project Reach support. After enjoying his new public speaking experience advising teens on how to make the transition from high school to college, he suggested that the college send him to high schools to recruit students with disabilities.

Scott, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, hopes to encourage other people with disabilities to enroll at Big Sandy by telling them about his courses and his work-study job in the college's disabilities office. He wants to become an elementary school teacher.

Shannon K. Crum was impressed by people whose disabilities were more profound than his own but who entered the disabilities service office with upbeat attitudes. His work-study job is in that office.

During the Café Project Crum spoke with high school students about Big Sandy's information technology program and the array of services available to help people with disabilities. "It doesn't matter if you have a disability or not; anybody can go to college," he advised the teens.

Crum found Big Sandy's testing center particularly helpful because it makes it possible for instructors to give him extra time on exams. "I can



Big Sandy Community and Technical College student mentors wore tee shirts that said "Just Ask" and "Students First" for the Café Project for high school students.

Courtesy of Big Sandy Community and Technical College

be as good as the next student; it just takes me longer than the normal student," he explained. After completing an associate of science degree in information technology, he hopes eventually to teach Web design.

As a mentor during the Café Project, **Karri N. Turner** talked with students about college courses that lead to careers in counseling. The high school students began picturing themselves as college students when she answered questions about what to wear and how exactly to get around campus. She gave the high school students her email address so they could contact her after they enrolled at Big Sandy.

Turner walks with crutches because of spina bifida, a birth defect that also caused a learning disability. She has also endured the early deaths of her parents and 23 surgeries. She hopes to become a counselor in private practice.

Turner completed her associate degree at Big Sandy in 2007. Her work on the Café Project was part of a practicum for a bachelors-level course offered by a four-year college on one of Big Sandy's campuses.

Janie Beverley, the college's coordinator of disability support services, said the Café Project enabled high school students to interact directly, without a sense of intimidation, with college students with disabilities who are succeeding in college. Beverley plans to continue the Transition Fair and the Café Project and, with new grant funding, to place Big Sandy students in jobs and other activities that let employers know that students with disabilities are willing and able to work.

their community programs. They recounted how students had helped clients with cognitive disabilities to develop new daily living skills, worked in a construction training program that had a community involvement focus, organized a fundraising gala for a senior citizen program, and upgraded an agency's server and Web site. (See Figure 5.)

The opportunity for students to have personal, hands-on experiences in their communities is one of the most rewarding outcomes of service learning. Project Reach students connected to their communities in meaningful ways primarily through service related to education, health care, adult literacy, and environmental stewardship, but their contributions helped stimulate new institutional relationships as well.

In rural Kentucky, Big Sandy Community and Technical College established new partnerships with nine high schools in the college's service area. The college offers an annual fall Transition Fair for high school students with disabilities where they complete financial aid forms and gather information about college admission and attendance. The program expanded through Project Reach as the college brought the same students to the campus again this

time for its Café Project career awareness event where college students with disabilities explained their courses of study and career choices to the high school students. Pre- and post-event surveys revealed that the college students felt their participation in the Café Project significantly increased their understanding of needs in the community, their responsibility to serve their community, and their roles as citizens. Faculty and community members uniformly agreed that service learning was worth the effort, that they would use it in the future, and that it helped students understand their roles as citizens.

New relationships also developed between Snead State Community College in Alabama and local high schools after the college students in an information systems course researched recycling efforts and developed presentations for high school students about recycling electronic materials. They hoped to establish an "e-cycling" center in their small community.

Prairie State College forged a new partnership with SouthSTAR Services, which provides care and services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Mount Wachusett Community College students provided transportation and other resources while working side by side in their community with veterans on Habitat for Humanity projects.

Edmonds Community College developed a program in which students in a building construction program could work with Habitat for Humanity. The college also developed an environmental anthropology program in partnership with 20 different government, tribal, and nonprofit agencies.



Courtesy of Big Sandy Community and Technical College

During the Café Project, automotive technology instructor Roger Owens explains program requirements and career opportunities to high school students who toured Big Sandy Community and Technical College.

Transition to Work

Project Reach colleges explored avenues to help students with disabilities more effectively make the transition from college to work by initiating

or enhancing courses or activities aimed at preparing students for employment. They offered one-day events, group activities, special projects targeting service learning activities, and networking opportunities that would help students develop more job skills and be exposed to career possibilities.

Courses

At Miami Dade College, Florida, students majoring in education served as facilitators for high school students from at-risk schools who were interested in a teaching career. Participating in the Student Empowerment Program, the students met once or twice monthly and also developed a service learning project at their respective schools. As a result of discussions about bridging differences and ability issues, one group of high school students developed an outreach event to include students with disabilities as the capstone service learning project they would implement at their school.

Students with disabilities at Henderson Community College, Kentucky, enrolled in an employability skills course where they could learn about job-seeking techniques. The course included instruction in writing résumés, searching careers, attending job fairs, completing job applications, and conducting mock interviews. After the course, the students enrolled in a service learning module in their career field to help them determine whether the field was right for them. Each student kept a journal and gained communications experience by writing and presenting a reflection paper to the class.

In a career development class at National Park Community College, Arkansas, students with disabilities completed a 10-hour service experience at Mid-American Museum. Leaders paired each student with an employee whose job related to the student's major field of study; for example, a graphic design student was matched with the museum's publicity

Collaborative planning by multiple campus groups resulted in nontraditional career exploration activities.

coordinator. Together, they worked on the design of museum brochures and program literature.

El Camino College designed a career exploration course specifically for students with disabilities and included a mandatory service learning component. Course content included career opportunities, employment skills, and self-efficacy. When surveyed, all students reported gaining skills in these areas.

Career Awareness

Job fairs, career awareness days, and related events helped students learn about opportunities and gain confidence in the transition process from college to work. In some cases, school-to-work transition guidance was embedded in student orientations to service learning. Students were encouraged to maintain journals or make portfolios documenting their contributions in work and service at community organizations.

Students at Brevard Community College who were interested in service learning activities used a community service directory to identify agencies and projects related to their own occupational or career interests. Staff and trained student workers in the college's Center for Service Learning then met with each student to provide additional information about the placement site and its expectations. Service learners at National Park Community College and elsewhere gained business contacts and references related to their future employment.

At one-day events students learned more about how they could improve job-seeking skills. As a result of perceptions gained from working with students

seeking service learning opportunities, Minneapolis Community and Technical College in Minnesota offered a self-advocacy workshop called “How to Talk about a Disability in an Interview.” Brevard Community College students with disabilities participated in the college’s Disability Awareness

Day as timers and team members in a challenge race. A special one-day event conducted with Hire Heroes USA at Northern Virginia Community College provided advice to returning veterans with disabilities, including tips about interviewing, résumé writing, and presentation skills.

National Park Community College Embeds Career-Based Service Learning

Service learning led to new career experiences and connections for National Park Community College students thanks to Project Reach.

Project Reach did “exactly what it was supposed to do [for] career exploration,” according to Mary Kay Wurm, director of career services at the college in Hot Springs, Arkansas. She cited faculty reports of students confirming their career decisions or changing their majors based on their service learning experiences as evidence of the ongoing success of Project SERVE (Students Encounter Real Vocational Experience).

With strong support from the college president, faculty in many disciplines made service learning part of the fabric of the college. It has become integral to five degree programs: radiology technology, residential construction, recreation leadership, nursing, and medical laboratory technology.

- Radiology technology students helped with food drives and held health clinics at the Jackson House Food Bank. In 2008-09 they began coordinating a new, campus-wide recycling program.
- Residential construction students have helped Habitat for Humanity build a house every spring since the college received the Project Reach grant in 2005.
- Recreation leadership students sponsored a fishing day for area children, working



Courtesy of National Park Community College

Maxee Miller, a National Park Community College student with a low vision disability, decided to go into teaching rather than nursing because of her “very fulfilling” service learning experience at Jessieville Elementary School.

with the Arkansas Game Commission to stock a lake for the event.

- Nursing students organized and staffed wellness fairs at local schools and at the college.
- Medical laboratory technology students ran blood drives on campus twice a year.

Project SERVE has been incorporated into career development and psychology courses, as well as several sections of the Freshman Success Seminar. Opportunity Day is now a college-funded annual event that brings 25 nonprofit organizations to campus to recruit volunteers. Service learning projects are an ongoing source for new college-community partnerships, particularly with the Mid-America Science Museum and Garven Woodland Gardens.

Most Project Reach colleges used the expertise of disability support services staff as the base for launching efforts to help students with disabilities make the transition from college to work.

El Camino College piloted Project Searchlight specifically to provide guided leadership and advocacy training for students with disabilities and to assist them in their transition to work. The students participated in a campus-wide Career Expo activity. In an initial workshop, students with disabilities prepared a list of employers to visit, practiced questions to ask, learned how to dress appropriately, received assistance in preparing a résumé, and were assigned a partner. In a follow-up workshop the students shared information about what they had learned and completed a questionnaire about their experience. By the second year, Project Searchlight transitioned into individualized student coaching sessions for decision making and career and academic planning.

Collaborative planning by multiple campus groups at El Camino College developed career exploration opportunities for students with disabilities. The groups were the Industry and Technology Division, the Women in Industry program, and a high school transition program. Following a student panel presentation on various career and technical education programs, the college's fire technology program hosted 20 students with disabilities for a one-day, hands-on activity at the college's offsite Fire Academy. Students with disabilities were paired with mentor students for activities that included extinguishing a burning building. Post-event survey results revealed that students were more aware of the programs available

and, overall, there was greater awareness of the importance of being more inclusive.

Campus School-to-Work Services

Disability services staff, faculty, volunteers, and current and former students themselves are part of workforce preparation efforts for students with disabilities in many colleges.

The disability support services office at Minneapolis Community and Technical College connects current students with disabilities with recent graduates or other students in the same field of interest. Often students are reluctant to make these contacts on their own or do not have the time to seek them out. A retired management consultant volunteers his time at the college to mentor students working on particular projects, coaching them on effective communication skills.

Like many other institutions, Edmonds Community College's disability support services office offers advising, tutoring, mentoring, and accessible computer stations to students with disabilities. Some Edmonds students also serve as office staff workers and as tutors and mentors to others, a situation that enables them to develop workforce skills while in the familiar college environment.

Counselors at other colleges meet with disability service specialists and students with disabilities to discuss strategies to help the students determine careers and prepare for employment. Besides traditional vocational assessment and career counseling, counselors recommend service activities, job shadowing, and informational interviews. Career services departments offer interest inventory testing as part of student orientation and arrange for students to meet with staff to learn about job information and any accommodation needs.

Most of the Project Reach colleges used the expertise of staff in their offices of disability

support services as the base for launching efforts to help students with disabilities make the transition from college to work. All of the colleges, however, discovered the benefits of informal as well as formal cross-departmental collaboration in helping students take the next steps toward employment.

Miami Dade College embeds school-to-work transition guidance in student orientations to service

learning. When students meet with staff of the Center for Community Involvement, they learn how service learning can increase their employability. Students are encouraged to maintain journals or make portfolios documenting their contributions in work and service at community organizations. Service learning staff and disability support service staff began working together during Project Reach to increase efficiency

“Engaged” Anne Arundel Expands Service Learning, Revitalizes Disability Awareness Club

More than 1,000 Anne Arundel Community College students participate each year in service learning with 117 partner organizations. In 2008 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recognized this extraordinary level of community involvement when it added the community engagement classification to its categorization of the college.

Not resting on their laurels, college officials used Project Reach to increase the participation of two groups of students who were not usually among those involved in service learning: students in developmental education courses and students with disabilities.

“Their need for engagement is even higher than other students because of their high attrition rates,” said Trish Casey-Whiteman, associate vice president at the college in Arnold, Maryland.

The low rates of participation by students in developmental education and students with disabilities ran counter to the college’s experience and national evidence that service learning improves students’ capabilities and success rates. “Whether in credit or developmental courses, engaged learning improves students’ persistence,” Casey-Whiteman said. Part of Project Reach’s funds supported efforts to re-energize a college club, Students Organized for Disability Awareness (SODA). The club attracted

26 students with disabilities who chose to increase the visibility of disability issues at the college by staffing a booth during a campus-wide health fair and offering a workshop on assistive devices.

Club members also gained skills in leadership, budgeting, and event planning by organizing a campus-wide event where Jesse Billauer, a professional surfer, spoke about how he overcame injuries that made him a quadriplegic.



Courtesy of Anne Arundel Community College

An Anne Arundel Community College student stops to review a display prepared by the college’s SODA club, which raises campus-wide awareness of disability issues.

and maximize their efforts for students with disabilities.

Creating a Supportive Institutional Climate

Community colleges routinely provide accommodations and other disability support services for students who register for assistance. Disability awareness days feature guest speakers, resources, and activities for all students. The availability of tutoring, sign language interpreting, adaptive equipment, and other services is fairly well known. Sometimes, however, simply including students with disabilities in “routine” activities can result in rewarding consequences. During an exchange visit at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, 16 Chinese visitors from Jianxing University had an opportunity to meet a group of students with disabilities. This was a meaningful event for everyone, particularly when the university vice president learned some sign language from one of the students.

Assistive Technology

Technology-driven innovations often benefit the disability support field. For example, Central Piedmont Community College piloted the use of a new “smart pen” that gives students the ability to record sound and synchronize the audio with written class notes. Central Piedmont also launched a Facebook page to connect, recruit, and engage students with disabilities and to encourage them to be more involved in service learning and the college as a whole. National Park Community College added adaptive equipment to its career center. Partnering with a nearby university, Northern Virginia Community College hosted an assistive technology fair for students to see and try out various adaptive tools available to them.



Courtesy of Edmonds Community College

Edmonds Community College's Rolling Tritons Wheelchair Basketball Club offers a support system and provides opportunities for its members to mentor others. Some members worked with students in a materials technology course to help design parts for wheelchairs using new composite technology. The Rolling Tritons athletes were viewed as experts by class members, some of whom had enrolled at Edmonds after sustaining on-the-job injuries and who were able to connect with the chair users at a personal level.

Support Networks

Students valued group support meetings with disability service staff that covered such topics as transportation issues and accommodation needs. In Project Reach meetings, progress reports, and focus groups, faculty and staff identified additional ways to create a welcoming institutional climate that helps students feel part of the organization while also gaining skills and self-confidence.

All of the Project Reach colleges reported the value of student clubs and discussion groups as a way to engage students. Through its RATE (Realizing Abilities Through Education) program, students with disabilities at Minneapolis Community and Technical College held weekly meetings to discuss accessibility, inclusive service learning, and related issues.

Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland revitalized its faltering SODA (Students Organized for Disability Awareness) club. The college hired a recent graduate with disabilities to help work on

Project Reach. She served as a role model for SODA members and others. Club members became active in the college's annual Disability Awareness Day, MS Walk, and health fair. They gained skills in leadership, budgeting, and event planning by organizing a campus-wide event.

Students at Mount Wachusett Community College began the process to establish its first club for students with disabilities. This initial step holds promise; the college has donated 10 acres of land for a veterans rehabilitation center to be built on campus. The project will help veterans and their families receive psychological and physical rehabilitation while having access to educational services as well.

Label Us Able, a club at Prairie State College for students with disabilities and students interested in the disability field, has community outreach as its focus.

Edmonds Community College organized a wheelchair basketball club, the Rolling Tritons, whose members serve as mentors to youth wheelchair users as they develop their athletic and motor skills, self-confidence, and team-building skills. Students, staff, and faculty members of Club Vet at Edmonds participated in the Freedom Run. According to the college's Project Reach director, together "they walked, ran, hiked, cycled, kayaked, lifted, and swam their way to 5,216 miles, one mile for each fallen soldier in Operation Iraqi Freedom."

Awards and Scholarships

The service learning field touts the value of celebrations and recognition of contributions made by community members, faculty, and students. Some of the Project Reach colleges extended the idea to honor the accomplishment of their high-achieving students. Brevard Community College and its Reach-Fly-Soar program established an

award to honor an outstanding service learner with disabilities at the annual volunteer recognition event organized by the college's Center for Service-Learning. All community college students who completed a service learning project received a certificate of appreciation, and outstanding students earned a certificate of award.

The Center for Service-Learning at Edmonds Community College offered part-time AmeriCorps education awards through the Students in Service program. Students with disabilities who committed to serve 300 to 900 hours on campus or in the community received AmeriCorps awards that provided firsthand work experience, as well as funds that helped them continue their education.

"They walked, ran, hiked, cycled, kayaked, lifted, and swam their way to 5,216 miles, one mile for each fallen soldier in Operation Iraqi Freedom."

— Tom Murphy, instructor,
Edmonds Community College

Leadership Opportunities

Project Reach colleges established, continued, or expanded programs that gave students leadership opportunities through mentoring, student ambassador programs, representation on committees and councils, or in clubs and discussion groups.

Big Sandy Community and Technical College provided similar community college-high school mentoring opportunities through its career awareness Café Project. National Park Community College students with disabilities who were enrolled in a recreational leadership program mentored elementary school students participating in an

after-school program at the Mid-America Science Museum in Arkansas. The college also initiated service learning mentor roles for community college students working with high school students with disabilities.

Many community colleges offer some type of student ambassador program. At El Camino College the program provides campus outreach activities and tours for prospective students with disabilities. Miami Dade College developed its student ambassador program to promote service learning to students with disabilities. The program is open to any college student who commits to promoting service and service learning. Service learning ambassadors learn about service learning through training conducted by the service learning and disability support service staff. Each ambassador agrees to recruit at least one new student. The new “recruit” commits to learning about service and service learning, participating in an employability skills workshop, and completing at least one service event or enrolling in a service learning class.

Participation in college councils and committees offers another path for students to observe leadership skills and develop their own. In some cases, students gained additional employment skills through their involvement with a college council or committee. Students who serve on Miami Dade College’s Abilities Awareness and Recognition Council find their experience promotes not only employability skills but also skills in self-efficacy and social

Some students leveraged the confidence they gained from new affiliations by volunteering to help plan and implement campus events.

“Be the Best That I Can Be”

Miami Dade College sent a delegation of 12 students to the Florida Campus Compact service learning conference in January 2007. Michael, a student who has Asperger’s syndrome, was part of the group that represented the college. Upon their return to the college, the students reported having an “amazing” time at this leadership event. Michael said it was one of the best experiences he had ever had, and he made a formal report to his peers on the Abilities Awareness and Recognition Council. His presence at the conference profoundly affected his fellow Miami Dade students. One wrote afterward, “It is actually funny; the most important thing I learned was from one of the students that I attended the conference with. Michael raised his hand during the conference and said, ‘It shouldn’t matter what people think about me. I should be happy with myself and be the best that I can be.’ Since the conference, I have pondered a lot on this comment and realized that being myself is what’s most important.”

interaction. Brevard Community College expanded its Service-Learning Advisory Committee during the Project Reach grant period to include a student with a disability.

Some students leveraged the confidence they gained from new affiliations by volunteering to help plan and implement campus events, or to make presentations to high schools or at professional meetings. Some examples:

- A young woman overcame depression and anxiety to march confidently into a room of 100 high school students and explain technical education programs open to them at her college.
- A student traveled by airplane for the first time, across the country, to appear on a panel with seven students from other colleges, to speak to

faculty, staff, and community partners at a two-day meeting.

- A student presented, with faculty and a community partner, at a national convention for community college leaders.
- Two students—one with Asperger’s syndrome, and the other with a borderline personality disorder—who credited their newfound confidence to their service learning experiences, received kudos after presenting at a regional Campus Compact conference.

“Service learning transformed my teaching because it has inspired and motivated my students.”

— Mary Ann Leiby, instructor,
El Camino College

Service Inclusion in Developmental Education

The challenges of developmental education—also known as remedial education, compensatory education, or basic skills education—have attracted increasing attention in recent years from public and private sector leaders who are concerned about barriers to student achievement and success. High-profile programs geared to community college students—such as the national Achieving the Dream initiative led by the Lumina Foundation for Education, the Basic Skills Initiative in California, and the Developmental Education Initiative launched by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—ratcheted up the national conversation about developmental education. However, none of these programs focuses on students with disabilities.

Students place into developmental education

courses for many reasons, including disability-related challenges, lack of alignment between high school and college curricula, or simply a need for a refresher course after being out of school for many years. Students may or may not have a disability; if they do, they may choose not to disclose it. Regardless of individual circumstances, overall success rates for students in developmental education are dismal. On the other hand, evidence is mounting that student engagement in general, and participation in service learning in particular, encourages students to persist in college (Prentice & Robinson 2007).

One goal of the fourth year of Project Reach was to learn more about infusing service learning into the curricula of developmental education courses. Eight colleges already familiar with service learning added service opportunities for students with disabilities. During their work with developmental education, the colleges experimented with diverse strategies and discovered both unexpected challenges and inspirational successes.

Teaching developmental courses is challenging. Students in these courses, including those with disabilities, are considered to be at high risk for dropping out. While the idea of providing service opportunities to their students may be appealing, some instructors were reluctant to take on another task, as they are so focused on improving the students’ competency levels. Other developmental education faculty, committed to service learning principles and a new way to engage their students, welcomed the opportunity offered through Project Reach. Although they reported that it often took great effort to engage their students in service learning due to compelling personal and academic challenges, the students’ highly positive service learning experiences more than compensated the instructors’ efforts.

Mary Ann Leiby, a faculty member at El Camino College, explained it this way: “Service learning has

transformed my teaching because it has inspired and motivated my students, most of whom have learning disabilities, to work together to overcome obstacles, achieve academic goals, and help others.”

Service Learning Integration into Courses

Service learning was incorporated primarily into developmental education courses in reading and writing. A reading instructor at Minneapolis Community and Technical College created a service learning module on environmental issues that integrates successfully with the requirements of the college’s regular developmental reading course. Students received a handout on possible service activities. Students could choose to plant trees with Great River Greening on a Saturday or to work in the mammal nurseries at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, or they could opt to do an on-campus public education project. For any of the choices, they were required to write an essay about how they had changed their own habits in response to what they learned.

“As an instructor it is so fulfilling to read their journals and see the transition before my eyes . . . they’re deeper thinkers.”

— Nancilyn Burruss, instructor,
El Camino College

At Henderson Community College students in developmental education courses read to Head Start children using books purchased through Project Reach.

At Snead State Community College students participated in an optional service learning project as part of their developmental English course. The students created and narrated video recordings in which they discussed ways to prepare for the college placement test. The college’s chief academic officer presented the video in area schools.

Nancilyn Burruss, a faculty member at El Camino College, incorporated service learning into her remedial writing courses. She made converts of her students—even the ones who rolled their eyes upon learning they would have to serve four to six hours at a community site and then write about their experiences. “As an instructor it is so fulfilling to read their journals and see the transition before my eyes . . . they’re deeper thinkers,” she said. She also found it more interesting to read students’ accounts of their service learning projects, rather than expository writing about assigned readings. “Their writing is so much better because they are interested in these projects,” she said.

Margaret Boas, a developmental education professor drawn to service learning at Anne Arundel Community College, wrote a training manual for other faculty to use as they began to add service learning options to their courses.

Courtesy of Anne Arundel Community College.



Students and faculty at Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland work together to plan a service learning project that meets the professor’s classroom goals while engaging students in the process of learning. Students also sign a service learning contract.

Campus-Based Service

Community college staff can provide meaningful service opportunities on campus for students. One disability support coordinator, frustrated with the reluctance of community sites to work with a student with autism, lined up his service opportunity in her own office, where he expertly and reliably scanned a backload of documents. Another student worker, who had a vision disability, trained him.

Anne Arundel Community College specifically designated its disabilities support services office as a site to engage service learning students with disabilities in meaningful service activities. The college plans to conduct longitudinal research on the planned expansion of service learning in developmental courses and has incorporated this effort into its strategic goals for student access and success.

Grateful Veteran Gives Back

A Navy veteran who received support services at a critical time in her life, Sybil Haynes welcomed the service learning aspect of her English course at El Camino College. She went beyond course requirements, visiting vets almost daily in the Veterans Administration's health care system in Los Angeles. "I just have to give back," she said. She knew older vets get few visitors and younger ones often do not have family or friends who understand their experiences. Her class service learning reflection essay illustrated Haynes' positive perspective:

"Plenty of veterans would love to share a conversation, have a laugh, or find out how you are doing in school. . . . It's not only an experience for them, but for you also. You may want a career in patient care or the medical field. Do yourself a favor; come out and see what the military world is all about, and I guarantee you that you will be surprised and curious enough to stay a day."

**"Often other students
(and instructors) greatly
underestimate what
students with disabilities
can do."**

— Alex Crittenden, instructor,
Minneapolis Community and Technology College

During her work with Project Reach at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, developmental education instructor Alex Crittenden described why it is important to engage students early in service learning. She noted in a presentation to colleagues how easy it is to do that in reading and writing courses. She cited in particular the advantages of having students in reading courses do on-campus public education projects centered around issues of the environment and sustainability. Crittenden said:

"Students are deeply interested in the subject and never complain that the activity is not relevant to them. . . . When participating in the public education events, students . . . explain issues to others in plain speech, which builds paraphrasing skills. [There are] no complaints or worries about transportation [and] most of the preparation can be done in the student's own home."

Being able to read and talk about key issues is an important goal for reading instructors. Crittenden concluded that putting students in this kind of visible leadership role at the college is especially valuable to students with disabilities. "Often other students (and instructors) greatly underestimate what students with disabilities can do."

Other Service Opportunities

One-day service events appear to be a promising way to engage students in developmental education courses.

At Central Piedmont Community College, students in the compensatory education program—who themselves had various disabilities, including Down syndrome—participated in two such events. The college’s annual Walk a Mile in My Shoes disability awareness program and the Martin Luther King Challenge became new service opportunities for these students.

Students in a human development course at El Camino College engaged in service learning by assisting with an annual event: the college’s Day of Self Esteem, which is held on campus in collaboration with Working Wardrobes, a nonprofit community organization. Participants from the community—men and women in crisis seeking to re-enter the workforce—attend a day of motivational, career, and educational speakers. They enjoy makeovers and select wardrobes to prepare them to enter the workforce. El Camino students completed service hours by assisting in activities to prepare for, host, and clean up after the event. Students were key to the event’s success because they served as role models for success. Working Wardrobes organizers attended the course to listen to students’ reflections on their experiences at the event.

Outreach to Veterans

Colleges participating in the fourth year of Project Reach responded to a call to engage and provide support for veterans, including military personnel coming off active duty and National Guard members returning from wartime deployments. Many were returning to civilian life after medical discharges.

Connecting Curriculum and Community

Led by Tom Murphy, an energetic and knowledgeable faculty member who also is a veteran, Edmonds Community College launched a strong effort to open meaningful opportunities for veterans beginning a new phase of their lives. Veterans enrolled in service learning courses as varied as writing, introduction to business, international relations, anthropology, Arabic, and ecosystem ecology. Veterans in the Edmonds LEAF (Learn-n-serve Environmental Anthropology Field) School studied human interactions with local ecosystems while growing food for local food banks, restoring salmon habitat, and monitoring rare wildlife through tracking and remote cameras. As part of Murphy’s human origins and cultural anthropology courses, they also assisted the First Nations Student Association production of an annual powwow and mentored youth with disabilities in the college’s Rolling Tritons wheelchair basketball club.

Veterans in English (introductory, analytic, and research writing) courses at Edmonds explored voices in wartime, interviewed survivors of war, and examined cases of genocide. They shared their research as part of the college’s annual celebration of service learning. Some of the veterans in English courses helped prepare an exhibit called Profiles in the Art of Living, which featured student essays and photographs for a rotating art display in campus hallways. A future round of exhibits, featuring veterans, will be titled Profiles in the Art of Courage.

Edmonds created a Veterans Resource Team that brings together key individuals in student services with veterans who are student leaders, staff, and faculty members. The team meets monthly to address issues related to the admission, retention, and success of veterans on campus. The college’s Club Vet introduced the practice of sharing challenge coins to welcome new veterans to campus, to let them know they are not alone, and to encourage them in their

Veteran Uses Project Reach Lessons In Expansion of Veterans Conservation Corps

Jeremy Grisham, a project manager for the Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC), a veteran assistance program, bases his work on what he experienced as an environmental anthropology student at Edmonds Community College. Grisham served as a Navy corpsman for 12 years before taking a medical retirement.

"I model what I do on what I learned with Tom Murphy at Edmonds," Grisham said. Murphy, also a veteran, is an anthropology instructor and directed the college's Project Reach program. He leads the Learn-n-serve Environmental Anthropology Field (LEAF) School at Edmonds. The school uses service learning to investigate cultural anthropology. Students participate in activities alongside foresters, mariners, tribal dancers, and others involved in the ecosystems of Western Washington.

After completing his associate of applied science degree in natural resources in 2009, Grisham was promoted to create new VCC programs at three other community colleges and to direct the program at Edmonds. VCC's training and volunteer opportunities help restore the state's natural resources.

One of his largest projects at Green River Community College involved coordinating the work of up to 20 veterans at a time on wetlands mitigation in Covington, Washington. Grisham did more than just send people into the wetlands to pull out invasive plant species.

First, veterans attended a program where city employees introduced them to the neighborhoods where they would work. Then the veterans tested water quality throughout the city. With this scientific evidence in hand, Grisham explained the environmental importance of unclogging the natural filtering of the wetlands by removing the invasive plant species.

Several veterans who were pursuing degrees



Courtesy of Veterans Conservation Corps

Veterans Conservation Corps participants at Green River Community College conducted water quality tests and learned about equipment used to restore natural resources during a program at the Institute for Community Leadership in Washington.

in natural resources management developed plans to make the wetlands fully functional. Their sketches of what the wetlands should look like guided the mitigation efforts. Ten of the 30 veterans who started in the VCC at Green River in 2007 were employed by 2009 in natural resources; 11 others started small businesses with VCC's help.

All the participants were asked to take notes as they worked and to talk about their service learning experiences afterward. This reflective component was often difficult for veterans dealing with a wide array of issues including post-traumatic stress disorder.

After state budget cuts eliminated the VCC participants' stipends, the veterans continued to show up for conservation-related work projects. Some used the skills they had learned; others were drawn by the camaraderie of the work teams that sometimes included AmeriCorps members and community partners.

transition from warrior to student. (The military custom of exchanging challenge coins began during World War II.) With support from the college's Veterans Resource Team, Club Vet proposed the creation of a permanent "boots to books" monument on campus to welcome and honor veterans. The monument will be a permanent art display in a central part of the Edmonds Community College campus.

Re-entry Services

Northern Virginia Community College, located near the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, and Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., focused its Project Reach activities on service members wounded in overseas deployments. The college partnered with Hire Heroes USA and 20 local military-friendly employers to develop a Wounded Warrior Corporate Immersion program. Northern Virginia Community College counselors and students, themselves veterans ingrained with the value of service to country, helped run a day-long event geared toward helping wounded veterans return to the workforce. The military service members arrived by bus directly from their hospital rehabilitation wards to participate in the event. The program has become an annual event.

The college provided a comfortable atmosphere for learning about job openings and brushing up interview and presentation skills. Students served as mentors to attendees as they registered for the event on-site and then attended résumé-writing workshops. Potential employers held mock interviews, navigated their Web sites with interested service members, and offered their business cards. The immersion event exemplified the power of networking and service, a point noted by Michelle Saunders, director of Hire Heroes USA. A wounded veteran who spent 22 months rehabilitating at Walter Reed Medical Center, she pointed out the inability of service

"The student veterans were huge assets in making the service members feel comfortable."

— Michelle Saunders, director,
Hire Heroes USA

members to network for a civilian job while on active duty. She emphasized the importance of the informal mentoring, saying, "The student veterans were huge assets in making the service members feel comfortable."

In reflection afterward, one student veteran wrote: "This event is truly geared towards education. It helped both . . . employer and job seeker in understanding the values and benefits of one another. It provided us with a non-threatening and educational setting in which to ask questions we would not normally feel would be appropriate in a real-life interview situation."

Northern Virginia Community College's



Courtesy of Frances Villagran-Glover

Service members arrive by bus from the National Naval Medical Center to attend the Wounded Warriors Corporate Immersion Program co-sponsored by Northern Virginia Community College and Hire Heroes USA at the college's campus in Alexandria, Virginia. Students who also were veterans guided participants through the program, which helps wounded veterans return to the workforce.

intention to engage veteran students in course-related service learning fell victim to the economic downturn of 2009. Students were poised to provide airport welcoming receptions for World War II veterans from other parts of the United States. The elderly veterans were scheduled to visit Washington, D.C., as part of the national Honor Flight program to visit their war memorials in the nation's capital. Students planned to interview the veterans, capture

their memories, and create podcasts of the interviews to share in classrooms. The Honor Flight program, however, is fully dependent upon private financial support to cover the free one-day airfares for the veterans and when donations plummeted, the flights were canceled. The college plans to reinstitute the program when funding improves.

Other colleges gained an awareness of veterans' needs and lessons about the importance of having

a campus climate that is friendly to veterans, regardless of their disability status. El Camino College held a veterans fair that was well-attended by non-profit organizations but not well supported by students. Discussions with students in the college's veterans club revealed that many students who were veterans were reluctant to attend open events that "targeted" or otherwise identified their group. The club decided to work with various campus groups to establish a space dedicated to veterans for peer support, computer use, and other resources.

Courtesy of Lynn Barnett



World War II veterans from South Carolina gather in May 2008 for their group picture at the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. Their trip was made possible by Honor Flight.

Successes

Research suggests that service learning is likely to be sustained when it is tied to institutional planning and priorities (Prentice 2002; Prentice, Exley, & Robinson 2003). Project Reach challenged colleges to sustain their focus on service inclusion for students with disabilities, including students in developmental education courses and veterans who may or may not disclose a disability status. While some colleges officially expanded activities or programs that were already in place, others found ways to embed newer efforts solidly into the organization. Project Reach colleges produced notable successes; they also laid the groundwork for solid next steps for service pathways for the success of all students.

Student Development

Faculty and staff saw rewarding accomplishments among the students who participated in Project Reach, ranging from course completions to engagement in the community.

The courage some students demonstrated by speaking before large numbers of people for the first time was remarkable. Their joy about being able to help someone else for the first time inspired their instructors. Some students surprised themselves when they realized what their service experience

taught them about themselves as well as their community. Other Project Reach students graduated and became contributors to their communities and even regional or state leaders in their fields.

Attitude Shifts

In general, students who participated in hands-on activities through day-long or other events reported gaining a better understanding and appreciation of inclusion as a positive value. After taking part in a disability awareness day simulation, for example, students without disabilities reported greater empathy for students who overcame daily challenges that seemed overwhelming in a simulation.

Students with disabilities who took part in service activities reported increased self-awareness, self-confidence, and pride in their contributions to their college or community. Some faculty saw

Faculty and staff saw rewarding student accomplishments ranging from course completions to engagement in the community.

"Many of Us Share Common Fears and Issues"

Although I knew many people that attended this mosque weekly, I never connected with them on the level I did volunteering. There were a handful of women who didn't even have a place to sleep at night, let alone feed their children. The only 'real food' they would eat all week long was at the mosque, and the only time some of the kids would open up and actually have friends to play with was at the mosque. Even though I couldn't lend a hand to everyone, I could at least show how much I cared.

"It was definitely not what I expected it to be like. I've learned so much more about myself these past few weeks than I have in the past 19 years of my life. One main thing I improved about myself is not to complain about the small challenges I face, but to help myself overcome them.

"Before, I judged people by the way they looked. The most important thing I gained after volunteering is that I've learned that no matter what color or race you are, many of us share common fears and issues. Nobody can do everything, but everyone can do something. I did something—and it was definitely one of the most moving things I've done in my life."

— A. Raza, student, El Camino College,
writing in her service learning reflection journal

students taking more interest in reflection and writing assignments that were connected to their service.

Strides were made in creating positive campus and community attitudes toward students with disabilities and veterans with or without disabilities. Project Reach colleges became more knowledgeable about creating supportive environments for students by starting or resurrecting clubs for students with disabilities. They recognized the need to be more proactive about being "vet-friendly" organizations. Minneapolis Community and Technical College featured its Veterans Welcome Center on its Web site

along with a description of the college as a place that is "welcoming for people from all walks of life" and "work[s] hard to ensure that everyone who walks through our doors feels comfortable and is treated with respect."

G.I. Jobs magazine named Edmonds Community College a Military Friendly School for 2010. The honor ranked the college in the top 15% of all colleges, universities, and trade schools in the United States. Edmonds' Club Vet president, who graduated in June 2009, went on to become Washington state's director of Student Veterans of America.

Expanded Offerings

Building on strong and long-standing institutional commitment to service learning, colleges purposefully expanded their work to include students with disabilities and students taking developmental education courses. The number of service learners expanded through outreach efforts that included offering service learning options in college orientation or student success courses, or simply by inviting students with disabilities to participate. New mentoring programs matched first-generation college students or community college students with disabilities with elementary and secondary school students in the community, and with at-risk youth in an alternative school.

Collaboration

Finding new ways to collaborate may be one of the most important outcomes of Project Reach, which prompted many colleges to initiate collaborative working relationships across departments and offices, as well as in the community. A new Veterans Resource Team at Edmonds Community College linked together key college staff and student leaders to address issues of concern to veterans on campus.

The ACCESS Services program at Miami Dade College expanded to three other campuses when two departments joined forces to create an inclusive service learning program. The two offices were near each other but had never worked together before. A partnership between the Disability Support Services Office and the Center for Community Involvement at Miami Dade led to faculty and community partner training for a service event on two campuses; it also established a process to identify “service-learning-ready” community college students with disabilities, and then to provide opportunities for them in service learning.

Brevard Community College developed its Reach-Fly-Soar program as a joint endeavor of the college’s Office for Students with disAbilities and its Center for Service-Learning. The cross-departmental collaboration produced a program that claims an impressive range of benefits to help students with disabilities succeed. Posted on the college Web site, those benefits included: self-efficacy, enriched learning, career exploration, improved self-esteem, critical-thinking skills, employment contacts and skills, making a difference, broadened horizons, learning through experience, and civic engagement. Student service learning leaders at Brevard, including some with disabilities, serve as college liaisons to community partners.

Edmonds Community College opened a new Center for Service-Learning under its Office of Student Life with a full-time service learning program coordinator. Northern Virginia Community College hopes to integrate service learning into its first-year experience program for new students. Several colleges joined or formed new partnerships with Campus Compact to enhance service learning efforts.

Minneapolis Community and Technical College collaborated with the disability services offices of two state vocational and rehabilitation agencies to

Project Reach prompted many colleges to initiate collaborative working relationships across departments and offices.

help continue activities initiated by Project Reach. Big Sandy Community and Technical College’s community collaborations doubled its college-ready outreach program to area high schools and launched a new annual career awareness event.

When asked about the collaboration that developed between faculty and disability support services staff during Project Reach, project leaders described training, professional development days,

Student Gains New Self-Awareness from Service Experience

Brevard Community College in Cocoa, Florida built on its long tradition of service learning to create through Project Reach a new program called Reach-Fly-Soar to engage its students with disabilities. One student described in a program brochure the effect of a positive service learning experience on career preparation:

“One of the benefits of the program for me was the realization of my potential to contribute to society despite being physically handicapped. A positive effect of this was a boost in my self-esteem. I also decided to change my major in pursuit of a more fulfilling career. Volunteering at several service sites increased my network of people who may help me obtain a job by giving me advice, introducing me to potential employers, and being references. The amount of learning that I gained from participating in the program is quite remarkable.”



During a disability awareness day at Central Piedmont Community College, a student simulates a learning disability called visual/motor integration deficit by attempting to draw a straight line around a star while looking at a mirror.

mentoring, workshops, and word of mouth as key to sharing information for forming new relationships. They felt their collaborative work resulted in better “bonding” in the classroom that led to increased student retention. They called the new environment “transformative,” as passive students gained a greater sense of who they were. They also thought their new collaborative relationships modeled to students and community partners that what they were providing was valuable.

A student who participated in a focus group about his experience in Project Reach responded enthusiastically about the collaboration across departments at his college: “Both the disability services and service learning offices were always

asking me for my opinion,” he said, adding, “I love how the two offices have joined forces.”

Outreach Tools

Project Reach colleges used Web-based technology, including social networking media, to engage more students with disabilities in the college and in service. Service learning college Web sites were redesigned to make them more accessible, to provide more information about both service learning and the college disability support office, and to help educate faculty, community agency personnel, and students.

One college established a Facebook presence as an outreach strategy, and other institutions expressed interest in doing the same. Another college developed a Web site where all of the service learning training materials and site information can be deposited and where faculty groups can communicate freely with one another.

A developmental education faculty member at Anne Arundel Community College created a training manual, *Student-Driven Service-Learning: A Partnership in Education*, for instructors who want to create, implement, and assess a “student-centered, student-developed service learning project” in their classes (Boas 2009). Written as a “soup-to-nuts how-to guide for professors of all ages” to implement service learning in classrooms, it is a step-by-step guide that puts students at the center of their own engagement in learning. It includes strategies to help students with disabilities and students enrolled in developmental math and English courses to take ownership of their projects. The manual provides a rubric to help guide faculty and students in developing their service learning project, with models, sample handouts, and student worksheets. The guide will be used as a basis for service learning workshops and is available to faculty at other community colleges.

Strategies used to support and celebrate service learning faculty included regular forums to discuss experiences and resources, and recognition events to honor exceptional service learning faculty.

Organizational Change

Several colleges incorporated Project Reach goals into their strategic plans or institutionalized changes in working relationships for student engagement and service learning. Centers for service learning were strengthened with the addition of staff, such as a full-time director to coordinate and track student placements. Several colleges strengthened service learning advisory committees with the addition of representatives from disability support services. Other colleges expanded support for service learning faculty through new service learning or civic engagement centers. One college's career center was renamed the Career and Service Learning Center, and two instructors in Washington were recognized for their service at an event at the governor's mansion.

Changes were made in orientation or other course offerings that serve many students with disabilities, and colleges found new ways to incorporate new service learning options. More attention was given to seeking and documenting needs for accommodations on service learning promotional materials, and students who registered

Several colleges strengthened service learning advisory committees with the addition of representatives from disability support services.

with a college's disability support service office received information about service learning. Many of the colleges used new grants from the corporate and nonprofit sectors to support and expand their service activities begun with Project Reach.

Service Learning Encouraged Students to Be Proactive

"A large percentage of our students come from poverty and the working class, from communities and situations in which social activism and volunteer work are done for them not by them. Service learning has been a means for me to encourage them to take a more assertive, proactive approach to their education and to their communities."

— Mary Ann Leiby, instructor,
El Camino College

Challenges

Every new venture confronts some kind of challenge and usually faces unexpected ones. Project Reach was no different. The participating colleges reported an array of circumstantial and attitudinal challenges—as well as some beyond their control, ranging from increased workloads to weather-induced delays and budget woes related to the economic downturn.

Expectations and Perceptions

Just as many students with disabilities are reluctant to disclose their disabilities, so were many veterans hesitant to convey their military status. In both cases there is a lack of trust or a fear of judgment. All veterans may be perceived to be alike when the reality is that regular military service members and National Guard service members may have very different experiences, expectations, and hardships. Some colleges already are seeing a need to serve family members as well as veterans themselves. Veterans may be reluctant to participate in events that could label them as military people in civilian communities unaccustomed to the military. Although some campuses are making strong efforts to be perceived as “vet-friendly,” these attitudes present challenges for college faculty and staff, and particularly for disability support service staff who are ready to help if only they were asked.

Some colleges struggled to find welcoming service sites for students who required extra accommodations. Some instructors’ assumptions about student ability or willingness to participate in service

exacerbated the situation when they excused students with disabilities from completing service modules or did not provide accommodations that would allow the students to participate. Colleges reported a need for continued efforts to promote service learning and to recruit students with disabilities on campus and in the local high schools. One particular challenge is how to meet the information and service needs of first-time college students whose parents are accustomed to hands-on attention for their children who received disability support services while in the K–12 system. (See Figure 6.)

Program goals also may not always align with staff or student readiness. There may be a need to address generational or apprehension issues with online social networks, for example, that otherwise

Time was needed to build collaborative working relationships. Departmental “silos” had to be broken down.

might be expected to be comprehensive and inclusive outreach and recruitment strategies.

Collaboration

Although Project Reach colleges generally benefited from new partnerships that developed on and off campus, time was needed to build lasting collaborative working relationships. Departmental “silos” had to be broken down as evidenced by staff from offices for service learning, disability support services, and veterans affairs who had never worked closely together before. The same is true of college institutional research and disability support service offices as colleges struggle to identify and serve students with disabilities—and to assess how well they are doing. Externally, collaborative relationships with community agencies require careful development to ensure that service sites are appropriate and welcoming, while being seen as “co-teachers” in a reciprocal relationship.

Economic and Capacity Issues

The economy took center stage at some campuses, affecting faculty, staff, and students. Squeezed by increased enrollments during a time of reduced state funding, some colleges faced hiring freezes and layoffs. Faculty stretched to capacity were sometimes reluctant to take on new responsibilities for revising syllabi to reflect service learning in their courses. Staff resources were strained by an increase in the number of students with disabilities who required additional attention at service sites.

Anticipation of an enrollment surge worries some colleges. At least one college already has seen an increasingly larger influx of students with disabilities as students leave secondary education and get ready to move into community colleges. The sheer numbers concern some college personnel: do

they have the capacity and staffing to serve everyone? A related concern is about the campus role that “helicopter” parents might expect to play in their children’s college experience at the same time that many students are anxious to claim adulthood and make their own college and career decisions. Some disability support service personnel report this to be a challenging situation for their offices.

Data Collection and Reporting

It is difficult to collect accurate data on service inclusion for students with disabilities for several reasons. The biggest challenge arises from the fact that a student must disclose his or her disability by registering for support services, and many choose not to register. If they choose not to register, they will not be counted in the cohort of students with disabilities. Confidentiality remains an issue. Faculty, who do not necessarily know which students in a class have disabilities and which do not, cannot determine the impact of service inclusion on students with disabilities. It appears that institutional research offices and disability support offices may need to do more to work together. Both of these offices are often under-resourced at many colleges, so it is not a simple fix.

FIGURE 6.

Transitioning from High School to College: Information for Students with Disabilities

LEGAL BASIS FOR SERVICES

High School

- The primary law is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act also apply.
- School districts provide free identification of students with disabilities and follow the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process to establish educational services, setting, and goals.
- The proposed outcomes, evaluation criteria, and instructional methodologies may be modified.

College

- The Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 apply. Colleges may not discriminate in recruitment, admissions, or participation in programs and services solely on the basis of disability.
- Students wishing reasonable accommodations must self identify, provide current disability documentation, and request disability-related services.
- No standardized process exists for accessing services and processes may vary widely among colleges.
- Because of FERPA regulations, students over 18 years of age are expected to be in charge of their self-advocacy for accommodations. Students are responsible for setting their own goals, requesting services, and monitoring their own progress.

STUDYING AND TIME MANAGEMENT

High School

- Time is often given during school hours to start homework and time required at home may be minimal.
- Teachers often hold review sessions and remind students of what is required.

College

- Students may expect to spend 2 to 3 hours outside of class preparing for each hour in class.
- Professors expect students to prepare for exams, ask questions, and understand notes, readings, and other assigned work.

TESTS AND GRADING

High School

- Assignments may be shortened and makeup tests are often offered.
- If established in the IEP, the student may have a lower standard of course mastery.

College

- Students take the same exams as their peers but may receive accommodations such as extended time, an alternate testing site, or a reader or scribe.
- Students are expected to meet the same grading and mastery standard as other students.

Source: Student handbook and related materials provided by El Camino College, 2009

FIGURE 6.

Transitioning from High School to College: Information for Students with Disabilities

SCHEDULES AND CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

High School

- Students follow a prescribed curriculum established by the school district.
- Homework is checked and teachers prepare students for tests; teachers often remind students when assignments are missing or work is substandard.
- Reading assignments are often short and note taking may not be emphasized.
- Students go from one class to another every day of the week and will spend 6 hours each day (30 hours per week) in class.
- Most classes are arranged for students and teachers carefully monitor class attendance.
- Students are provided textbooks at little or no expense.
- Teachers provide students with information they missed when absent.
- Teachers present material to help students understand the material in the textbook. Often students are responsible only for what is presented in class.
- Teachers often write information on the board to cue note-taking on the material that students need to remember.

College

- Students take courses in accordance with placement test levels and degree fields of study.
- Professors assume that homework is completed and may not remind students of missing assignments or problems with work submitted.
- Reading assignments are often lengthy and notes may form a substantial portion of material to be tested.
- Students often have one or two classes per day, several times per week and will spend 12 to 16 hours each week in class.
- Students arrange their own class schedules with the help of an advisor. Professors may not formally take roll but they will know which students have been to class.
- Students need to budget funds for textbooks.
- Professors expect students to ask classmates for any notes or material from classes missed.
- Professors might not follow the textbook. They may offer illustrations, background information or relevant research, but they will expect students to assimilate the textbook readings.
- Professors may lecture, expecting students to identify the important points in notes. Good notes are a must in college.

Source: Student handbook and related materials provided by El Camino College, 2009

Lessons Learned

The collective experience of the 14 Project Reach colleges revealed lessons applicable to other postsecondary institutions that want to create a climate of service inclusion to help students succeed. The project revealed the importance of good working relationships between a college's service learning and disability support services offices, and to provide optimal academic and personal growth experiences for students with disabilities. In addition, service learning appears to help welcome and engage veterans and to improve motivation and achievement of students with or without disabilities in developmental education courses.

Five themes emerged from the cohort of Project Reach colleges that may be useful for other colleges that want to instill the idea of service inclusion at their own campuses. Lessons and recommendations below center on the themes of student potential, student engagement, institutional climate, collaboration, and decision-making and accountability.

Recommendations

1. Recognize the potential of all students.

Project Reach reinforced the idea that all students can benefit in some way from a service experience. A commitment to opening up new lines of communication among students, faculty, staff, and community members can help remove the stigma that may be associated with a disability. Colleges can seek out students who may have been left out in the past, including students with disabilities, students

in developmental education courses, and veterans. To serve students equitably, colleges may first need to find ways to confront uncomfortable attitudes or misguided perceptions.

2. Develop strategies to engage students in service.

Students with disabilities can become involved in service learning opportunities through courses, club activities, and special events. "One-shot" group service activities or other transitional activities can provide a supportive environment to get started in service learning for students with disabilities, for students in developmental education, and for veterans returning to college.

Colleges can shape and reinforce positive student engagement through orientation, training, and professional development for faculty. Some students may benefit from orientation sessions at the college about nonprofit organizations and their roles in the community. Students' written or oral reflections on

their service, when shared with faculty and others, often provide powerful motivation for colleges and community agencies to deepen their commitment to providing successful service experiences. Faculty and staff can be effective as active recruiters for student engagement.

The time required to orient faculty in departments that have not previously offered service learning, or to offer professional development regarding placement site accommodations, can pay dividends in increased student engagement. Appropriate and effective placement sites may be located on or off campus. Clear and honest discussions about expectations in the classroom and at the placement site increase the likelihood of meaningful service learning experiences.

3. Create a climate of inclusion.

Students flourish in an organizational setting in which everyone feels welcome. For Project Reach students with disabilities or veterans returning to college, feeling that they belong is especially important. For some, simply being asked to participate in service activities was a turning point in their lives. Being able to contribute, individually or as part of a group, was a profoundly meaningful experience for most students. One faculty member summarized the environment as one in which students' fears were understood and respected, as most of them were fears of the unknown.

The Project Reach grants elevated conversations about what helped to create a climate of inclusion. Factors that affected students' perceptions of the organizational climate included accessibility of facilities, equipment, and people; availability of knowledgeable and collaborative faculty and staff; clear and open communications; centralized services for students; social networks and peer support opportunities; "disability-friendly" and "veteran-

A climate of inclusion was one where people were "open to a new set of eyes, igniting a new mind-set for new discussions."

friendly" offices; outreach programs to acclimate new students; and purposeful strategic planning.

4. Build internal and external collaboration and partnerships.

Internally, Project Reach heightened awareness of the need for collaboration and the development of new relationships, which require planning and time. Service learning, disability support services offices, and, in some cases, veterans affairs offices agreed to work together, often for the first time, in order to provide students with optimal academic and personal growth experiences. Cross-departmental awareness was important in establishing or re-energizing student clubs.

Externally, community partnerships moved from verbal agreements to formal written agreements that built on new understandings about appropriate language, privacy issues, or accommodation needs, including on-site supervision and monitoring. Agreement about schedules and deadlines was important. Colleges worked with community agencies to deliver orientation and training for staff at service placement sites and to keep communications open between faculty and agency staff at the service site.

5. Make informed decisions about how to support student progress.

Project Reach prompted some colleges to reassess their capacity to serve students with disabilities on

campus and to help community partners formally document and evaluate students' on-site service experiences. However, obtaining accurate data about community college students with disabilities remains a challenge. Students must report their disability status to receive accommodation services; some prefer maintaining their privacy, or simply blending in, to reporting their disability status.

Community college institutional research offices and disability support service offices—both likely to be under-resourced—do not routinely share data and may not be aware of the data collected by the other office. Without sufficient student data, it is difficult for colleges to assess how well they are serving students with disabilities, or how well they are serving students who do not choose to reveal their status as veterans. Anecdotal evidence from Project Reach suggests that students with disabilities did not always complete their service learning experiences; research on the degree to which this happens and

why it happens could provide valuable information for program planning and assessment.

More information is needed about how to identify students who could benefit from support services without violating their privacy. Perhaps lessons will emerge as more students with disabilities transition successfully from high school to college. U.S. Census data suggest that rural areas seem to have a larger percentage of people with disabilities than suburban or urban areas. More information on how the needs in rural communities are being met might guide community colleges on strategies that would help more students succeed in completing their service and academic programs.

As community colleges face demands for accountability from state and federal policymakers and their own local constituencies, the data collection problem somehow must be resolved. Data-informed decision making can help colleges improve their service pathways to student success.

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Web Resources

Association for Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD)

AHEAD is a professional membership organization for individuals involved in the development of policy and in the provision of quality services to meet the needs of persons with disabilities involved in all areas of higher education. It has partnerships with 30 regional affiliates and other professional organizations working to advance equity in higher education for people with disabilities. www.ahead.org.

Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

The Clearinghouse supports the service-learning community in higher education, kindergarten through grade 12, community-based initiatives and tribal programs, as well as all others interested in strengthening schools and communities using service-learning techniques and methodologies. Its web site contains information and resources to support service-learning programs, practitioners, and researchers. www.servicelearning.org.

National Organization on Disability

The mission of the National Organization on Disability is to expand the participation and contribution of America's 54 million men, women, and children with disabilities in all aspects of life. www.nod.org.

National Service Inclusion Project

The National Service Inclusion Project is a Corporation for National and Community Service training and technical assistance provider. Through comprehensive training, technical assistance, and product dissemination, NSIP strives to ensure meaningful service experiences for all Americans, regardless of their abilities. Most services are free of charge. www.serviceandinclusion.org.



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