



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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SERVICE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES: LINKING PAST AND PRESENT

Community colleges offer a variety of service learning programs. Linked historically to the idea of community education, service learning is becoming a major offering in many colleges, emphasizing the responsibilities that individuals have to becoming better citizens and active participants in working for the common good of their communities. Many colleges are now looking to historic preservation activities as components of their service learning offerings.

Historic preservation is linked to the discipline of public history that also encompasses archival management, museum work, editing, archaeology, genealogy, and the public administration of historic resources. In its basic philosophy, historic preservation programs provide a liberal arts focus, based upon the belief that heritage touches all areas of the human experience. It has become an integral part of society, expanding interest and involvement at a level never previously imagined. There are now some 3,000 preservation organizations actively engaged in public education, advocacy, preservation, and restoration projects of various kinds. At least three community colleges have established degree-granting programs in preservation education—Bucks County Community College (PA), Northern Virginia Community College, and College of the Redwoods (CA). Another, Pasco-Hernando Community College (FL), offers a service learning initiative that has become an integral part of its history curriculum. In light of the increasing interest in historical preservation efforts, sharing information about these programs and this initiative may encourage other colleges to consider adding some increasingly popular historical preservation components to their service learning offerings.

Bucks County Community College

Bucks County Community College formally established its historic preservation certificate program in

1991—the first community college-level program in historic preservation in the U.S.—and currently enrolls between 75-90 students per semester and graduates approximately 48 students each year. The 24-credit-hour certificate program offers a strong service learning component with several neighborhood preservation groups in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, metropolitan area. The program is closely affiliated with the National Park Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior, and provides introductory classes in historic preservation theory to new Park Service personnel. Students conduct investigations of local historic properties in their own neighborhoods and report back on the status of neighborhood preservation efforts. Students also have frequent contact with local government officials regarding the enforcement of historic preservation ordinances. [A virtual online course in historic preservation history and theory is being developed—integrating traditional coursework, such as projects and reports, with work on the history and theory of American preservation accessed online with downloaded slides and through links to national sites; and requiring participation in online discussion groups.]

Northern Virginia Community College

The area referred to as Northern Virginia is as rich in history as it is with high-tech industries that have a major impact on the residential growth of this region. The area is well-known for its strong community volunteer spirit. Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) formally established its certificate program in historic preservation in 1991, based on and propelled by the success of an existing Bucks County program (in which several nonprofit historic preservation groups, organized as the Heritage Resource Volunteer Program, were offering biennial conferences on NVCC's Alexandria campus). The eight-course (24 semester hours) curriculum was designed by nationally known preservation professionals and prominent local government and community leaders for students who wish to develop or refine research, analytical, and field skills in historic preservation, archaeology, and museum studies.



The program offers a supervised internship that allows students opportunities to have actual field experiences with a host of historic preservation agencies, including the National Park Service, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and National Air and Space Museum. NVCC developed a course in historical archaeology that incorporates fieldwork in the United Kingdom and other sites in the European community. Classroom work frequently involves projects with significant community value—e.g., students are required to prepare nominations to the National Register of Historic Places and to shepherd the nominations through the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Pasco-Hernando Community College

In August 2002, the Division of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences at Pasco-Hernando Community College (PHCC) embarked upon a service learning initiative to provide students with the opportunity for reflective experiences in nearly 50 different community organizations, museums, and local government organizations. History students currently participate in optional service learning components in such institutions as the St. Petersburg, Florida Museum of History; the Ybor City Museum State Park in Tampa, Florida; the West Pasco Historical Society, Inc.; and the New Port Richey Main Street Program, an affiliate of the National Main Street Program sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Students are required to participate in 40 hours of community service, prepare a reflective essay on their experiences, and make a brief oral presentation to their respective class near the end of the semester.

Students are involved in:

- Research in preparation for changing exhibitions
- Developing lesson plans for students in elementary, middle, and high schools
- Conducting museum gallery tours as docents
- Developing outreach programs in collaboration with area schools
- Conservation of artifacts, textiles, photographs, and documents.

In addition, they have participated in a service-learning component with the City of New Port Richey Main Street Program, Known as Greater New Port Richey Main Street—comprised of business owners and residents in historic downtown and surrounding community. They have assisted in the development and revitalization of the area by providing educational information about the role of the downtown area in the

life of the community for residents and visitors alike, and participated in the establishment of a community art gallery, in grant research for historic preservation efforts, and in market research to support economic growth in their community.

Conclusions

Service learning has provided the opportunity for community college history students to become involved in the preservation and revitalization of their communities, providing that critical link between events of the past and the impact that history has on today's world. In addition to understanding the fundamentals of historic preservation, these programs generate interest in the discipline of public history and continue to produce dedicated preservationists for a variety of museum and nonprofit organizations. The concept of service learning appears to have found a secure place within the nation's community colleges.

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