

News Release
Immediate Release

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Community colleges see the world as their oyster

Students and faculty learn about other cultures

By Carrie Hamilton, Summer Intern, System Office

Note: Each of North Carolina's community colleges participates in global education. The following article highlights a few of these initiatives.

The world's population is rapidly growing, but access to its people is more readily available than ever. Students and faculty members of the North Carolina Community College System are utilizing their resources and reaching out to as many people as possible. Whether through local cultural initiatives or study abroad programs, each of North Carolina's community colleges is raising awareness of global diversity.

In the fall of 2006, the State Board of Community Colleges amended its mission statement to include global education. In recent years, the system has developed extensive partnerships with colleges in the United Kingdom and played a major role in building the community college system of Thailand from the ground up.

Alice Lentz, director of TRIO Programs at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute and co-president of World View, an international program for educators headquartered at UNC-Chapel Hill, said the System's commitment to global diversity is advantageous to both students and instructors. "What was amazing was the institution's (Caldwell) dedication of funds for faculty and staff to travel."

Since its 1998 inauguration, World View's mission has been to "help schools and colleges prepare students to succeed in an interconnected world in which the rules have changed for everyone." The organization attempts to achieve this goal by helping the educators. "World View offers professional development for teachers in order to attune them to globalization," Lentz said.

Although Caldwell is a new member of World View and its global education program is in its early stages, Lentz, who chairs the college's global diversity committee, said the interest in global learning is overwhelming.

Many instructors applied for international travel, and about half of the applications were accepted. "It's great because it shows how much interest there really is to travel," Lentz said.

A member of their culinary staff visited Paris and hopes to return with a group of students. An art instructor visited Italy and also wishes to return with students. In July, a biology instructor will take students to an environmental station in Bermuda.

"We are learning, but making great progress," Lentz said. "Seeing that interest is spreading across campus is wonderful."

More than 20 of the state's community colleges work in conjunction with World View. Constanza Gomez-Joiner, foreign language chair and head of the global connections initiative at Durham Technical Community College has a long-standing commitment to global education but finalized a partnership with World View in 2006 to enrich their program. Their goal is "to raise awareness of today's multicultural society among our faculty, staff and students in order to further prepare them for their role as citizens in a global society."

The partnership focuses on the needs that faculty, staff and students have in order to reach their goal. These needs include providing lecture series, presentations and workshops to members of the Durham Tech community, expanding and continuing their English as a Foreign Language and English as a Second Language (EFL and ESL) programs, continuation of study abroad opportunities.

Before partnering with World View, Durham Tech formed a global connections committee. The committee meets about two or three times a semester to address globalization issues and programs dealing with globalization issues. Gomez-Joiner said they developed a global connections lecture series to help them reach global understanding and networking. They had three presentations in spring, two of which focused on religion.

"We had someone come in and talk about three perspectives on religion: Christianity, Judaism and Islam," Gomez-Joiner said. As a follow up to this lecture, Durham Tech asked representatives of each religion to lead a panel discussion on the roots and practices of their religion. "It was a real eye-opener for students that dismantled a lot of stereotypes," she said.

Durham Tech also offers a global citizen program that students may participate in while working on their associate's degree. The program, proposed and developed by Peter Wooldridge, associate dean of arts and sciences, identifies a set of course that Wooldridge feels "will best prepare students to function as pro-active citizens at the local, state, national, and global level." Courses like Hispanic civilization, social problems, nature of America and world religions set the stage for a global centric education.

Instructors at Pitt Community College are traveling the world to better understand global education and broaden the minds of their students. Recently, instructors have traveled to China, India and South Korea as part of the Rotary Exchange Program.

Dan Mayo, assistant to the vice president of academic affairs, went to China to visit vocational institutions. While there, Mayo visited the Wuxi Institute, one of the top vocational schools in China. In exchange, five of their instructors visited Pitt.

Mayo said that Wuxi receives more than 1,500 exchange program requests a year and he felt honored they chose Pitt for an exchange. "This is a model institute in China," Mayo said. "They visited four other community colleges while in the U.S., but stayed here for two weeks."

Wuxi educators formed an agreement with Pitt, a World View partner, to share degrees and offer language immersion courses. "This is a great experience for us," Mayo said, "We still touch base with Wuxi on a daily basis."

Stephanie Rook, dean of arts and sciences at Pitt, was selected by the Greenville Morning Rotary Club as part of a team to observe professors in India. Rook spent about five weeks visiting schools and colleges in northeastern India. During her stay, Rook was allowed to meet with teachers and educators and lectured on higher education.

Rook said she applies what she learned in India in her classrooms at Pitt by letting her students know how valuable education is to people in other countries. "I really appreciated the rigor and dedication to India has for education," she said, "and it is important that my students understand and respect that other nations have a long history of that."

Vance-Granville Community College has highlighted global awareness recently. Peter Metzner, psychology instructor, visited China in 2006 as a Vance-Granville representative for World View. Metzner learned about the countries primary, secondary and post-secondary institutions and compared American and Chinese community colleges. Metzner called the experience "a great exchange of ideas" and brings back to his students an awareness of Chinese culture and how the Chinese educate their children. Metzner saw this trip as a once in a lifetime opportunity and said that World View "makes the world a neighborhood."

While programs like World View help to support a global program, many colleges are building strong local initiatives. With a large Hispanic and Hmong population, students at Western Piedmont Community College have the world as their backyard. Mary Charlotte Safford, dean of humanities and social sciences, said that by combining service with education, Western Piedmont students experience diversity in their community.

English speaking students taking Spanish classes meet with Spanish students taking ESL courses. Safford said this exchange is beneficial to both sides, but especially for the ESL students. "They get to see the American students struggling and know they aren't alone," she said.

Western Piedmont will offer a course on the cultural study of the Hmong people in the fall. The course is designed to help students understand the rich cultural history of the Hmong, a group of people from Laos who fought alongside the U.S. in the Vietnam War. A highlight of this course will be the late fall observation of the Hmong New Year, a traditional holiday that celebrates the rice harvest.

Western Piedmont produces and participates in many cultural festivals in Burke County. Every year, they share cultural holidays and traditional foods at their Multi-Cultural Festival. Students take on a country and educate one another about the cultural traditions of that country.

Safford said that students and people in the community join together to celebrate their diversity. "It is a wonderful learning experience," she said.