



RAPPAPORT FAMILY FOUNDATION

An Overview of Civic Engagement Programs on Community Colleges

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Executive Summary

The community college landscape has experienced enormous growth in the last 30 years with enrollment peaking in 2008. Today's community college students are young, progressive, and hopeful about changing politics in their communities. While there has been a focus on developing the civic skills and participation of 4-year students, it is the training of 2-year students that pose the most return on investment, especially in affecting local change. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate the need and promise of training 2-year students into a generation of committed and skilled progressive activists.

This paper provides a primer on the criteria for effective political engagement programs and makes recommendations on how to get the three key stakeholders – leadership, faculty, and students – to implement and participate in these types of programs. By encouraging partnerships among institutions and other stakeholders, robust political engagement programs can be made a reality on 2-year campuses in the near future.

During a time of civic renewal among young people, we cannot afford to miss this narrow window of opportunity to equip the most progressive-minded generation in decades.

Who Are Community College Students?

The community college landscape has experienced enormous growth in the last 30 years with enrollment peaking in 2008. Millennials are a significant population on 2-year campuses. The focus on the average age of students (29 years old) is misleading because the older students dramatically bring up the average. The fact is that the community college population is quite young, a median age of 22; 43 percent are 21 or younger.

The growing student population is more likely to be female, low-income, and young. Community college students are also busy with other priorities; fully 8 of 10 are working part- or full-time, in addition to taking classes.

Why Does Their Civic Engagement Matter?

As we've witnessed in the last few electoral cycles, young people are a key constituency necessary to win. We've also seen the success of civic engagement programs at 4-year campuses and universities. Consider the current organizing efforts around education cost increases or the immigration reform movement, or the 2008 Presidential election.

Engagement programs on community college campuses also benefit the larger civic engagement movement and values the bottom-up approach to community change. Just as with 4-year civic engagement programs, these programs at the community college level:

- 1) Train community activists (from 'clients of change' to 'agents of change')
- 2) Create change with citizen-led solutions
- 3) Affect down-ballot (county and local) races

The Current Landscape of Political Engagement Programs

We conducted a literature review and interviews with experts in order to uncover and document all the institutional knowledge on programs that instill a lifelong commitment to political engagement. We found following four themes: limited formal body of knowledge, shrinking community college budgets, closest programs in purpose focus on more charitable service-learning, and that current federal government and private philanthropic initiatives focus on student access and academic or job-skill success.

Existing Models and Best Practices for Program Design

We identified three existing models that are currently working to increase the civic engagement of community college students: institution-based, permanent third-party, and intermittent training programs. Within each model exist different types of programs, although they are few in number.

Regardless of what kind of organization implements the program, successful design includes the six following components

1. Opportunity for academic credit (preferably core credit)
2. Curriculum with civic and issue-specific education
3. Co-curriculum with service-Learning focused on community problem-solving and transformation
4. Skills-training for advocacy and organizing
5. Leadership development opportunities for students
6. Clear measurement and assessment of student outcomes related to retention and graduation

The programs we profiled in this paper share a common approach to implementing a political engagement program on a community college campus. In broad strokes, it starts at the top with campus leadership, but requires a genuine bottom-up follow through to be successful and sustainable.

Finally, this paper also identifies specific solutions to challenges faced by key stakeholders - students, faculty and leaders.

I. Background, Methodology & Definitions

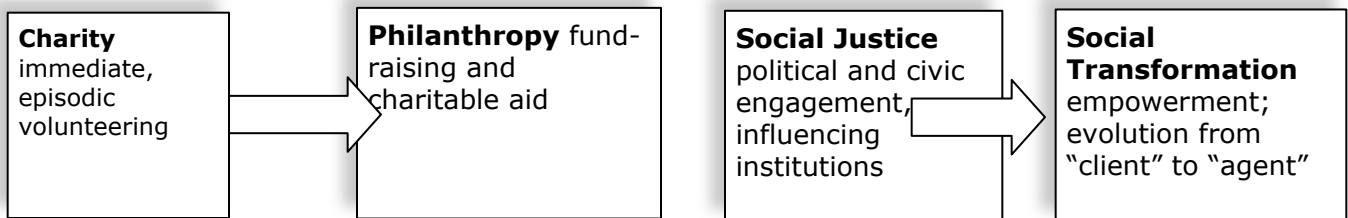
The goal of this paper is to review current models at the community college level that instill a lifelong commitment to civic engagement, encompassing not just volunteering and voting, but deep political engagement, including organizing and advocacy.

Our research included formal and informal interviews with leading practitioners and researchers in the field (see Appendix I) about the programs that foster a lifetime commitment to political engagement, and how these programs were implemented. Experts included leading youth civic engagement researchers, community college faculty, political engagement programs, and community college experts. We also conducted extensive research on secondary sources.

Our Definition of Engagement

Thomas Erlich's *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* included an essay written by Paul Elsner of the Maripoca Community College system in Arizona. In it, Elsner describes the "motivations for service-learning and volunteering" adopted from McAleavey and Pickeral:

The ideal motivations to instill a lifetime commitment to political engagement are **social justice** and **social transformation**. These programmatic motivations equip students to become agents of change, and should be the core of any service-learning component. This is how we define "civic engagement" and "political engagement" in this paper.



II. Who are Community College Students?

"A lot of students who are 18 or 19 go to college partly for the social aspect of it. At the community college, people's goals are a little different. Their needs are more immediate. It's a whole different atmosphere. When students come to the community college, they're focused. They know what they want to do, and they have a certain amount of time to do it." – Dr. Jill Biden in an interview with *Newsweek*, 8/12/09.

Set aside any stereotypes you may have about community college students.

A. *It is a Booming Population*

The community college landscape has changed dramatically in the last 30 years, experiencing a 264 percent growth rate, the fastest growing sector in higher education [Bob Franco slideshow]. More recently The Pew Research Center found that community college enrollment among 18-24 year olds peaked in 2008, due in large part to the economic recession, totaling 3.1 million Millennials.

"...community college enrollment among 18-24 year olds peaked in 2008 at over 46% percent of total undergraduates"

– Pew Research Center

More and more Americans are entering postsecondary education through community colleges. As of 2008, of all current U.S. undergraduates, community college students

264 percent growth rate in community colleges in the last 30 years–

Bob Franco,
Campus Compact

make up 46 percent of the population. It is estimated that over 50% of undergraduates are attending community college in 2010. What's more, of recent 4-year graduates, fully 1 in 2 went through a 2-year institution.

Now, more than ever, community colleges are both the conduit for students to make their 4-year college dreams a reality, and the training ground for developing 21st century skills. The profile of a community college student is being rewritten, right now.

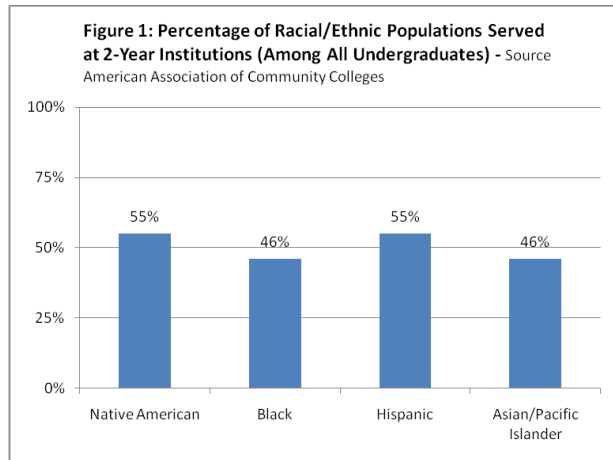
B. *It is Young, Diverse, Less Economically Secure, and Busy*

Millennials are a significant population on 2-year campuses. The focus on the average age of students (29 years old) is misleading because the older students dramatically bring up the average. The fact is that the community college population is quite young, a median age of 22; 43 percent are 21 or younger. That's just the start of this changing student population. In the words of De Anza Professor Nicky Gonzalez Yuen, community college students are "100 percent of America." What Yuen means is that these students are a true reflection of the American experience and opportunity.

The growing student population is more likely to be female, low-income, and young.

Figure 1 shows the rich diversity on community college campuses. In 2005, 2-year colleges served more than half of all undergraduate students from the lowest socioeconomic quintile.

Community college students are also busy with other priorities; fully 8 of 10 are working part- or full-time, in addition to taking classes.



III. Why does their Civic Engagement Matter & Why is it Valuable?

As we've witnessed in the last few electoral cycles, young people are a key constituency necessary to win. We've also seen the success of civic engagement programs at 4-year campuses and universities. Consider the current organizing efforts around education cost increases or the immigration reform movement, or the 2008 Presidential election.

Engagement programs on community college campuses also benefit the larger civic engagement movement and values the bottom-up approach to community change. Just as with 4-year civic engagement programs, these

- 1) Train community activists (from 'clients of change' to 'agents of change')
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- 3) Affect down-ballot (county and local) races

It appears that community college students are under-involved. A rough proxy for current student outcomes, research finds that 2-year graduates are less engaged than their 4-year counterparts. Further, according to the National Conference on Civics 2009 survey, college graduates were more likely than 2-year graduates to work on solving a community problem or to work on a community project.

However, they are eager for opportunities to engage in politics and advocacy. The Millennial generation as a whole demonstrates a hope and an inclination to make a progressive change in American politics, according to the Millennium Pendulum report from the New America Foundation, and community college students are no different.

Community college students represent a strong case for investment based on their:

- 1) Millennial tendency towards progressive values and policies;
- 2) appetite and hope for political change;
- 3) hyper-local nature (unlike their 4-year counterparts, they are likely to be the citizens and workers within the communities of their college); and
- 4) their age: these are prime trainable years because a person's attitude towards political engagement is typically defined during the college years.

Finally, 2-year programs have access to populations with historically low levels of political engagement. The rising voter turnout rates for non-white youth is on the rise and an indicator of the desire to become more civically engaged if the opportunities were made available.

IV. Current Landscape

A. Limited formal body of knowledge exists

Getting a firm grasp upon civic engagement programs as we define it at the community college level is difficult. Most research (and researchers for that matter) is at 4-year institutions; and survey data rarely identifies 2-year students. We conducted a literature review and interviews with experts in order to uncover and document all the institutional knowledge on this subject matter. The latter was especially important as it became apparent that the academic research on political engagement at the community college level is nearly non-existent.

We conducted a scan of the academic literature on civic programs and curricula at the community college level that create organizers and advocates, and found no quantitative or case studies on the topic of civic engagement as we define it.

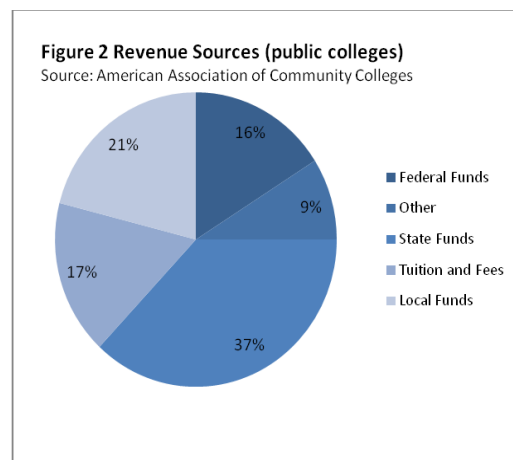
The civic engagement community has worked sparingly with community colleges. Researchers Constance Flanagan and Peter Levine admitted that most meetings with civic engagement professionals did not usually include a community college voice. This is due in part to the focus on research and outcomes at 4-year colleges and high schools. For instance, The Civic Mission of Schools report mainly focused on K-12 education interventions, and most 3rd party organizations work with 4-year college students.

Flanagan is currently conducting a quantitative analysis of civic outcomes at the community college level but it appears to be the first of its kind. Government and private surveys on civic engagement do not adequately identify community college students, lumping all undergraduates into one category. Without proper disaggregation, it will continue to be difficult to understand outcomes of this distinct population.

That aside, more general civic engagement case studies and research do add insight for the design and implementation of political engagement programs at any level, and require that best practices from 4-year schools be deliberately adapted for 2-year students.

B. Shrinking budgets despite increase in demand for community college access

It is well-documented that 2-year colleges are struggling economically while the demand for their services increases. Government funding, local and state funds are the chief revenue sources for community colleges at 58 percent (as shown in Figure 2.) This climate does not favor program expansion or experimentation.



However, this very situation could be an incentive for citizen-centered civic engagement, since institutions and their students are tethered economically to local and state politics.

C. Closest programs in purpose focus on more charitable service-learning, such as volunteering.

Available literature spotlights general civic education or service-learning approach. Service-learning is likely a component of any political engagement program but it must be focused on advocacy and organizing outcomes other than volunteering and charitable giving.

Most active civic engagement programs on 2-year campuses focus on building capacity for volunteering. As one of the largest financial supporters, The Corporation for National and Community Service's *Learn and Serve Program* provides funding for postsecondary institutions to advance service-learning as part of the curricula. Its mission is to boost resources for community based organizations (CBOs) to have, essentially, free labor. It's important for these CBOs to serve their community but it isn't clear that these programs are preparing their students to be leaders in their community with organizing and advocacy skills. Moreover, *Learn and Serve* is mostly on 4-year campuses.

D. Current federal government and private philanthropic initiatives focus on student access and academic or job-skill success.

Community colleges are being looked to by Dr. Jill Biden and President Obama, as a source of 5 million additional job-ready college graduates by 2020. Called the American Graduation Initiative, it emphasizes the importance of creating a skilled American workforce for the 21st century. This program will be infusing \$22 billion (check) dollars to increase the number of community college students as well as prepare them to be job-ready.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation is the largest private philanthropic grantmaker in this field and has invested nearly \$380 million dollars in community college efforts since 2003¹. Currently, Gates, Hewlett Foundations are investing heavily on identifying promising strategies to dramatically improve college success rates.

Finally, consider that of the six Presidential Honorees for Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, only one was a community college and its service-learning opportunities were designed to understandably increase workforce, not civic, skills.

¹ Foundation Center's Foundation Directory Online, March 2010.

V. Existing Models

We identified three models that are currently working to increase the civic engagement of community college students.

1. ***Institution-based*** providing civic education and service-learning
2. ***Permanent, third-party*** organizations that provide skills training and issue advocacy that are affiliated with institution over a longer-term
3. ***Intermittent training programs*** delivering advocacy training that are usually centered around an issue and temporary

Most existing models are institution-based, but analysis of all three kinds of models demonstrates that there are opportunities for success in each.

Typically, institutions offer civic education and service-learning, while third-party organizations and intermittent training programs offer skills training and issue advocacy. The interviewees we spoke with manage the richest programs and curricula offered in the area of political engagement training and education. From these experts we culled some of the most important components that see programs from the planning stage to implementation and sustainability. A few overarching themes emerged:

- Programs need to be student-centered
- Programs need an evaluation component to ensure student retention and long-term success
- Community college students are busy but have an appetite for “service” opportunities

A. *Institution-Based*

This model has two approaches. The first is curricula-based, wherein civic education and service-learning are intertwined in the general education curricula. The second is a program or department that focuses solely on creating opportunities for students to advocate in their community. This second one only exists in settings where faculty and departments make a stated claim to empowering students to organize, advocate, or get involved in another political way (more than just voting and other forms of electoral participation).

Institution-based kinds of programs are few since most that do exist focus on either charity and philanthropy service or opportunities to for the purposes of workforce development. Generally, institution-based interventions focus more on civic education and not training.

Institution based programs likely draw in the largest pools of students, since they have institutional marketing resources and can offer curricula geared towards graduation and transfer requirements.

Examples

- **De Anza's Institute of Community and Civic Engagement** "advances education for democracy with full participation on all of our communities as its core value." It has a range of programs covering civic skills training (through Campus Camp Wellstone), service-learning and internships, leadership development (Youth Voices United for Change) and a Leadership and Social change certificate. It also contains a number of resources for faculty to implement civic education and service-learning curricula, and resources for students and community partners to discover one another.
- **Kapi'olani Community College (KCC)** – Strong institutional interest in creating socially- and ethically-conscious citizen leaders. Students take issue-based curricular pathways that infuse service-learning, general education and civic education. The faculty at KCC found that when they offered social justice-oriented courses outside the general education requirements, students would not take them. Like De Anza, KCC offers resources to connect CBOs and students with relevant opportunities for credit.

B. Permanent, third-party

Independent organizations that either approach the campus or are invited to join it, deliver the particular advocacy or organizing skill. Regardless, the organization must be vetted by the college, for the practical reason to become a part of campus life and overall student services. These organizations must have an MOU or another formal agreement with the institution or a department within the institution in order to be considered credible.

Examples

- **Student PIRGS** – Invited onto 15 community college campuses and supported through student fees or earmark in the college budget. These fees pay for a Student PIRG organizer to run a chapter, working with the campus population around local issues. This model is an exact replica of the PIRG chapters at the 4-year institutions with a few tweaks (timing of meetings and pocket-book issues) to accommodate the time commitment and local student interests. Santa Monica Community College is a campus that invited the Student PIRGS onto campus by voting for a earmark of student fees to pay for a PIRG organizer.
- **Generation Engage (Mobilize.org)**. Through the Democracy 365 program, Generation Engage is providing active citizenship training focused on local issues that affect the daily lives of students at three campuses. Students learn who is involved in the issues that they are facing (community mapping) and how to campaign for the changes they want to see. Students are involved early-on in the process because the program's success hinges on whether the program addresses the basic needs the students are facing. GenerationEngage works with service-learning and/or student services

departments to create a partnership (usually through an MOU). Through this partnership, the university's departments send out emails on behalf of GenerationEngage to the student body. In addition, GenerationEngage tries to partner with faculty to offer extra credit for students who participate in the Democracy 365 program.

C. Intermittent training programs

These kinds of programs are provided by independent organizations that are not affiliated with the institution, and can come in the form of skills and education training or issue campaign experience. These programs reach the student population via an invitation from the college, as part of an institution-based program, or by drawing participants to an off-campus location.

Third-party and intermittent programs can offer deeper skills training to a smaller and more self-selected group since these groups tend to specialize in civic training and issue campaigns.

Examples

- **Wellstone Action** uses peer trainers to equip students with political advocacy and organizing skills in the Wellstone tradition. These training camps are hands-on and tailored to the local issues of the students, but the program does not live on campus. Trainers are brought in from off-campus, although there is a concerted effort to have at least one trainer from the region who has a better sense of local needs and issues. It costs \$3000 for a two-day training, which is typically paid for by the institution and sometimes funds are raised by the students. If a campus community has tried diligently to fund the training but comes up short, Wellstone Action will still try to work with the campus and provide the trainings.

The ideal intervention involves a combination of institution-based (civic education and service-learning) and third-party organization (skills training and issue advocacy).

The closest that comes to this is De Anza because they also have Wellstone Trainers and a leadership development offering through their civic engagement program. However, they do not have a sustainable funding model.

VI. Best Practices in Program Design

Regardless of how these programs are delivered, it is critical that programs are designed and implemented with solutions that address the unique challenges faced by busy, focused community college students. Thomas Ehrlich of Carnegie Institute for the Advancement of Teaching points to the “three Cs: curriculum, co-curriculum and campus.” In addition, the three key stakeholders need to be addressed and involved: Institution leadership, faculty, and students.

Ideally, a political engagement program and its curriculum should fit into the college’s goals of increasing retention and graduation rates, since these indicators are how the community college administration measure their own success. Experts interviewed wholeheartedly believe that civic education, skills and opportunities for organizing and lobbying will improve both retention and graduation rates, but there is yet to be research done to prove this hypothesis right or wrong.

Further, as Decker Ngongang, Director of Programs at Mobilize emphasized, the community college could be viewed as a civic hub, much in the way civic professionals view the role of other public schools. In other words, if schools can be the hub of activity for communities, not just for education but also for solving community problems and getting involved in politics, then students will naturally be drawn closer to the campus, thereby improving retention, graduation and engagement rates. Strategies for engaging students is then key.

Regardless of what kind of organization implements the program, successful design includes the six following components:

1. Opportunity for academic credit (preferably core credit)
2. Curriculum with civic and issue-specific education
3. Co-curriculum with service-Learning focused on community problem-solving and transformation
4. Skills-training for advocacy and organizing
5. Leadership development opportunities for students
6. Clear measurement and assessment of student outcomes related to retention and graduation

Programs we profiled share a common approach to implementing a political engagement program on a community college campus. In broad strokes, it starts at the top with campus leadership, but requires a genuine bottom-up follow through to be successful and sustainable.

Not surprisingly, we found that it was critical to address the specific challenges faced by key stakeholders (students, faculty and leadership). We found the following strategies and tactics in use.

STUDENT CONSIDERATIONS	
<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Solutions</i>
<p>Off-campus residence.</p> <p>Community college students typically don't live on-campus, so meetings and events must work with their schedule.</p>	<p>Day-time programming; multiple offerings.</p> <p>Programming and trainings must work around student schedules. Multiple opportunities to attend events and meetings will raise participation and retention rates; evening and weekend events are unlikely to work unless they are tied to curricula offered by the college.</p> <p>For instance, GenerationEngage does not hold any meetings after 5pm when students are likely to leave campus. The Student PIRGs hold multiple kick-off meetings to allow as many students to learn about how to get involved in a specific campaign.</p>
<p>Limited time due to juggling job(s) and family</p>	<p>Curricula and training should include pocket-book issues that directly impact students (e.g., transportation, tuition, healthcare, job prospects)</p> <p>Getting students in the door is the first step, but program retention is just as important. Once in, they must, as one interviewee put it, "continue to come in through the turnstile." This is especially true for outside programs that cannot create as many incentives without institutional support. Students need a reason to come to school and stay there when their time could be spent dealing with other priorities.</p> <p>Non-local issues are less attractive to 2-year students, because their immediate needs take precedence. Institutions with supportive student services and service learning programs can help make the college a civic hub, further anchoring students to the community college community.</p> <p>Programs should invite students to choose the issue that they will work on so that they are invested in the process and outcome. At De Anza and at the GenerationEngage site in Charlotte, students rallied around budget issues that directly affected their community college. The Student PIRGs found that health care was a major draw for students in Santa Monica.</p>

STUDENT CONSIDERATIONS	
<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Solutions</i>
<p>Student is focused on graduation, finding a job and will only take critical requirements.</p>	<p>Design curricula and/or programs that count towards degree or coursework requirements.</p> <p><i>At Kapi'olani Community College in Hawai'i, faculty discovered that when they offered social justice-oriented courses outside the general education requirements, students would not take them. Their solution was to weave in civics curricula into all departments, creating issue-based curricular pathways that infuse service-learning, general education and civic education.</i></p> <p>When inter-departmental cooperation is not possible, as is likely the case on most community college campuses, a single professor teaching a single course can still make a positive impact if they have the support of leadership, as in the case of <i>De Anza Community College in California</i>. There, Professor Nicky Gonzalez Yuen teaches a course in social justice, integrating social justice service-learning and civics education into his curricula. Faculty such as these are likely to be the exception rather than the rule, however.</p>

FACULTY CONSIDERATIONS	
Challenge	Solution
No civic curricula in place	<p>Import and customize curricula from third-party organizations, but allow time for faculty input in customizing curricula for each campus and student body. For example, a heavy Latino student body may have different issue concerns than a more non-Latino campus. Alternatively, rural students may have different transportation concerns than urban students.</p> <p>Invite organizations such as <i>Wellstone</i> and <i>USPIRG</i> to deliver programming</p>
Lack of incentives to develop or implement curricula	<p>Offer modest funding and institutional support for faculty in the form of fellowships, stipend, or paid sabbatical for planning.</p> <p>For instance, create a “civic curricula and planning” fund for community college professors to apply for with the purpose of using those funds to balance the time out-of-class that professors would need to spend in creating curricula.</p>
Limited time to assess impact or connection to retention or graduation rates	<p>Current staff is focused on managing programs and faculty have little time to develop curricula or conduct research, let alone measure impact. Bob Franco of <i>Kapi’olani Community College</i> and Campus Compact notes that when impact studies are conducted, success has been shown and it has become easier to request modest institutional resources and funding.</p> <p>Civic research methodologies at other levels of education (post-secondary, secondary) are the same throughout and are built upon the fundamentals of sound research. Most importantly, longitudinal testing should be implemented in order to ensure a lifetime outcome. These types of research can be modeled off current 4-year civic research or even from other social science research that observes longitudinal outcomes. The issue is that there has been no funding for these types of studies at 2-year institutions.</p>

CONSIDERATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP	
Challenge	Solution
Severe financial constraints	Look to outside funding sources to experiment in this area
Governance structure (College Boards) are inherently political and may or may not offer support	For a program to be successful, commitment to it must be shown at the institutional level, such as it is at <i>DeAnza College</i> and <i>Maricopa</i> .
	Connie Flanagan of Pennsylvania State University suggests that campus size may affect the ability to develop curricula. The smaller campuses may find it easier to develop or implement curricula because it is easier to connect faculty and build inter-departmental relationships