

## Project Community

*by Claire Dixon, Bonner Scholars Coordinator*

### Purpose

- Provides students with an opportunity to develop leadership skills through an entirely student-run community service office.
- Advertises and coordinates all service-learning initiatives and special events that bring community members to campus; manages funds for service-related projects initiated by students.

### Background

The idea came about because of a growing need for a centralized community service office on campus, as well as a feeling that all students committed to service deserve the type of structural support, training, and funding opportunities given to Bonner Scholars. Designed by Bonner Scholars at a Summer Leadership Institute in 1994, it was put into action the following fall. Traditionally, its focus was on supporting community partners with long-term commitments to Guilford, called "Committed Sites." Today, Project Community is available to support any service-related organization or event on campus.

### How It Works

#### Staff

Project Community (PC) is staffed by eight to ten students; some are Bonner Scholars and some are work-study students. The students interview for their positions and adhere to a regular weekly work schedule. A student coordinator, or a pair of coordinators. The Volunteer Training Coordinator, who supervises a PC. The student project coordinator runs weekly staff meetings to discuss ongoing projects, make plans for upcoming events, and consider requests for funding.

#### Office

Located in the Community Learning Department in the campus student life center, the PC is open 40 hours per week to assist students with community work placements and to provide administrative support for ongoing service projects and initiatives on campus. Project Community has a fairly large common work area equipped with one computer. Project Community shares several other computers with the Career Development Center next door.

#### Processing Requests

Due to the wide variety of needs, the office uses a work request system. Students or staff members who have a project with which they would like assistance fill out a detailed work request form explaining what should be done. PC employees pick up orders as they come in to work and sign them upon completion.

#### Project Examples

Work requests range from help with advertising for volunteers at a service site to planning events such as an annual on-campus MLK Day Celebration, which brings children and parents together to work with Guilford students. Other examples include planning and designing the annual Volunteer Fair and Retreat and organizing panel discussions and information sessions on social issues. The Service Coordinating Council (SCC) is responsible for distributing a pool of \$8,000, allocated by the student government, to service-related projects.

### What Makes The Project Unique

Unlike most student-run community service offices, PC's focus is on supporting and organizing service-

learning events and other initiatives rather than placing students at sites. Created by students for students, Project Community is completely student-driven and run. Students tailor the organization to their interests and abilities, as well as to the needs of the community.

Office positions are open to all students, providing an opportunity for Bonners to work closely with other community-minded students to support all forms of community learning on campus.

## **Benefits**

Project Community enriches the culture of service on campus by implementing the concept of service as an everyday aspect of campus life. By combining all service efforts under one umbrella organization, Project Community maximizes resources and communication, minimizes scheduling conflicts, and presents a united voice to the college and the wider community.

## **Timeline**

### **Summer**

The Bonner senior intern, two PC student workers, and the community learning staff plan for the coming fall's first-year service orientation programs and the Volunteer Fair and Retreat.

### **Fall**

PC organizes the following events: Volunteer Fair & Retreat, Halloween Kids' Fest, Red Cross Blood Drive, Soup Bowl Food Drive, Kids Vote, The Giving Tree (sponsoring families for the holidays).

### **Spring**

New PC workers are added and trained. Coordinators for the next year are selected. PC organizes the following events: the Bizarre Bazaar (a mini-volunteer fair), MLK Day Kids' Fest, AIDS week, Spring Kids' Fest, Raise Your Voice Week (encouraging student involvement in the political system).

## **Resources And Partners**

### **The Bonner Foundation**

- The idea to create Project Community came from a group of Guilford Bonners at a Bonner Foundation-sponsored Summer Leadership Institute. The structural, financial, and creative support that the Foundation provides is essential to the success of Project Community.

### **Guilford College**

- The College's student government allocates \$8,000 to PC's Service Coordinating Council, which distributes the funds to campus groups and individuals to organize service-related projects or activities. The College provides administrative funds to Career Development, Internships, and Community Learning, the department that houses PC. The College also provides office space and computers for PC. The cafeteria has donated food and refreshments to many of PC's on-campus events. College vans and the campus's service car are frequently used to provide transportation to and from community sites, as well as to bring community members to campus for various events.

### **Community Agencies**

- Staff members from each of Guilford's committed sites serve as guides and supervisors for many Guilford student volunteers throughout the year. Staff members from the not-for-profit agencies also attend many Project Community-sponsored events on campus.

### **Community Learning Staff**

- The three-person staff helps to organize, guide, and ensure the continuity of Project Community amid the constant turnover of student workers.

### **Federal Work Study**

- Project Community was created by and for students. The commitment, energy, and creativity of the students who comprise its staff sustain the project, and federal and institutional work-study programs fund many of these students.

## **Overcoming Challenges**

One of the challenges in creating Project Community was to help the staff, students, and faculty become aware of the benefits of an umbrella community learning organization. Because such an organization did not previously exist on campus, people needed to be educated about the concept and how it would work. Independent students used to working on their own sometimes needed to be convinced that a structured form of support would be useful to them. Project Community overcame this gradually as it became a presence on campus and evolved into its present role. Now students, staff, and faculty embrace the benefits of PC's consolidated resources because of the stabilizing influence it provides for students' service projects.

### **Evidence of Success**

The original three committed sites have more than doubled in number; Guilford students now work weekly with seven community agencies in the area. The College's commitment of one halftime staff member has grown to two full-time staff members who are focused on community learning in general. The number and scope of activities and events planned by Project Community have increased over time, from one event a month to nearly one every week. These events have also focused on involving the Greensboro community to a much greater extent.

### **How to Make it Grow**

An expanded fleet of vehicles available to students needing transportation to service sites would help the project grow. A larger office space with more computers would also be helpful.