

SUNY Westchester CC Receives \$3 Million NSF Grant

By Lois Elfman

As part of its celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, State University of New York (SUNY) Westchester Community College (WCC) announced it has received a \$3 million, five-year grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to increase the recruitment, retention and graduation rates of students pursuing STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). HSI is a federal designation given to schools that meet various requirements, including at least 25% of enrolled students being of Hispanic backgrounds.



Dr. Vanessa Morest

SUNY WCC will establish an HSI Resource Hub (HSI-Hub) that will be available to 14 regional SUNY and City University of New York (CUNY) community colleges. The goal is to create innovative initiatives and more effectively serve administrators, faculty and students. WCC President Dr. Belinda Miles has prioritized growth in high demand STEM fields and is excited to see the impact that this collaborative effort brings.

“Community colleges across the U.S. enrolled 52% of all Latinx undergraduate students. At the same time, about 50% of all students who begin in STEM change their major or fail to get a degree,” says WCC Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs **Dr. Vanessa Morest**. “Given the overall need for more trained workers in STEM fields and the underrepresentation of minorities in these positions, addressing this problem at the community college level is point of leverage to make a greater impact.”

Focusing on Student Support

“STEM occupations are growing about two times faster than other occupations (according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics), but currently only a small percentage of Hispanic, low-income and underrepresented students are completing STEM degrees,” Morest says.

The seven SUNY community colleges in the project are Dutchess, Nassau, Orange, Rockland, Suffolk, Sullivan and WCC. The seven CUNY community colleges are Borough of Manhattan, Bronx, Guttman, Hostos, Kingsborough, LaGuardia and Queensborough. These 14 colleges cover 11 counties in New York State. WCC has two partners for the HSI-Hub, Mentor-Connect and Arizona State University’s (ASU) Center for Broadening Participation in STEM.

Morest says there is already a lot of good work underway at the participating campuses. This project will facilitate the exchange of best practices to identify and broaden the impact of successful programs.

“Many campuses, including ours, have been implementing innovative student support programs that provide enriched academic support and faculty mentoring, undergraduate research and internships and other career development opportunities and wrap-around supports such as retention, completion and transfer counseling and financial support,” says Morest.

The mentored professional development for faculty will include culturally responsive instructional methods and grantsmanship mentoring to increase their capacity to pursue NSF funding.

Setting Benchmarks

To better ensure student success in STEM fields, WCC has noted that a critical first step is a sense of belonging in STEM fields. ASU’s Center for Broadening Participation in STEM has worked nationally to help faculty learn and adopt culturally responsive instructional methods. Another component to increasing student success in STEM is engaging faculty in innovative thinking about how to deliver the education. Mentor-Connect has helped hundreds of community colleges secure NSF funding, which is a goal for all the participating institutions. Morest says at least 10 HSI proposals are expected to be submitted to the NSF as a result of this project and will hopefully inspire the development of more HSI hubs around the country.

The professional development and grantsmanship program will take place in mentored cohorts bringing together a new group of four to five campuses each year to learn and work together. There will also be an annual event—the first one to take place at WCC—that provide a forum where administrators, faculty and staff come together to share best practices, information and important benchmarks.

“STEM innovation needs the ideas, input and talent of a diverse population—individuals who have different experiences, viewpoints and training have the capacity to truly innovate, create and support STEM growth,” says Morest, who notes that New York State has increased demand for a STEM workforce in areas such as bio-life sciences, nanotechnology, chip manufacturing and cyber security.

Establishing a Global Leader in STEM

“Ultimately, this five-year award will help make New York a global leader in creating and attracting jobs in life sciences, healthcare and public health, increase Latinx representation and success in STEM programs and better prepare CUNY students for jobs in these in-demand fields,” says CUNY Chancellor Dr. Félix V. Matos Rodriguez.

At the onset of the program, an advisory board representing the 14 colleges will be formed. There will be listening sessions to ascertain the needs of each campus as well as collective needs. After the first workshop on

continued on page 15

SUNY WCC will establish an HSI Resource Hub (HSI-Hub) that will be available to 14 regional SUNY and City University of New York (CUNY) community colleges.

THE REFLECTIVE LEADER: What is an Academic Leader?, continued from page 10

Dawn Z. Hodges, Ph.D., is retired from the Technical College System of Georgia. She served as Vice President for Academic Affairs at Southern Crescent Technical College. You may reach her at dawn.hodges623@gmail.com.

*This article originally appeared in *Dean & Provost*, a sister publication to *Women in Higher Ed*.*

Navigating the White Waters with Servant Leadership, continued from page 11

informed about changes in higher education so that they can use their background of experiences to frame future decisions. They also use the outcomes of decisions made in the past to make wiser decisions and to avoid previous mistakes.

Building Community

Sometimes competitiveness affects the health and everyday operation of an organization. During these times, the chair must strive to restore the health and strength of the department team. Building community is a principle of servant leadership that improves an organization's culture and reduces undesirable events, such as competition or low morale. Healthy organizations discourage competitiveness between individuals and do not allow one individual to succeed at the expense of the team. Servant leaders strive to cultivate healthy connections and relationships among the community of the organization. By empowering the team, camaraderie and a sense of team cohesion develop. Servant leaders who are successful in building community value the contribution of each team member and include all in accomplishing a shared vision.

Persuasion

Department leaders will encounter many situations where skillful persuasion builds team cohesion. The art of persuasion often takes time and requires active listening, discussion, creative thinking, and effective collaboration skills. Changes within an organization are sometimes met with resistance, and the task of restoring cohesion to the department rests on the chair's shoulders. Motivating a person who is resistant to change requires a reliance on persuasion, especially when trying to convince someone who is vehemently opposed to an idea. The servant leader's goal is to engage the employee in a conversation that leads to rejoining the team and embracing the goals of the organization. Relying on persuasion and collaboration rather than on one's positional authority often motivates those employees who are resistant to change to move in the direction of teamwork.

Healing

Chairs often encounter opportunities where it becomes necessary to heal conflicts and problems within the department. Taking action to solve interpersonal problems between department members fosters a healthier working environment for all. Healing is probably one

of the greatest strengths of servant leadership because restoring wholeness involves supporting others both physically and emotionally. Healing can be fostered in several ways such as coaching, mentoring, or providing the needed resources and support. It is important to understand that healing can be a lengthy process and that it may require continued support and guidance toward restoring an individual or an organization to a state of wholeness.

Conclusion

Although the concept of servant leadership is not a new one, its principles are still applicable today. When facing challenging obstacles, department chairs who practice servant leadership will make decisions based on what is best for the organization and its stakeholders to achieve the best possible outcome. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problems that a chair might encounter; however, applying servant leadership principles whenever the waters do become choppy can smooth the way for a positive work environment and improved collaboration. 📖

Cassandra Conner is vice president of the Tradition Campus and professor of education at William Carey University MI. Email: cconner@wmcarey.edu

*This article originally appeared in *The Department Chair*, a sister publication to *Women in Higher Ed*.*

SUNY Westchester CC Receives \$3 Million NSF Grant, continued from page 12

culturally responsive professional development and the first annual event, the HSI-Hub will host additional sessions on the subject.

Morest says there is a research goal of at least two HSI-Hub publications from the core research team each year over the five years as well as other published material from the participating campuses.

"All campuses will have involvement through the advisory board that helps us identify and roll out activities and engage the campuses," says Morest. "The most important elements of success are synergy, collaboration and a shared commitment to our students' success." 📖

The Unexpected Leader: Discovering the Leader Within You, continued from page 13

can do hard and uncomfortable things" (101). For all of us who know that leadership in academia can be difficult and uncomfortable, this wading into the water is a great place to start. 📖

Reviewed by Vicky V. Johnson, Head of the Department of Performing Arts at Tarleton State University, TX. Email: vjohnson@tarleton.edu

*This review originally appeared in *Dean & Provost*, a sister publication to *Women in Higher Ed*.*