Wagner College: Civic Innovations Assessment Report
Submitted by Amy Spring, External Evaluator
March 21, 2009

Wagner College began implementation of its Civic Innovations program August 2006. This was the first coordinated community engagement effort of its kind for the campus. With the funding of the Learn and Serve grant, a newly created Civic Innovations Program Director was hired, several isolated civic engagement programs were brought together offering programmatic synergy, faculty in departments began working on programs collectively, and the Provost and President focused their leadership on how Wagner College can use its institutional resources to engage with the Staten Island community in meaningful and educative ways.

Civic Innovations Performance Measures provided a focused structure of the evaluation activities. An external evaluator began her work by visiting Wagner College in August of 2007. The outcomes for this initial visit were:
1) establish an working relationship with program staff so that evaluation data could be utilized in both formative and summative ways
2) establish structure with the program staff so that output data would be collected systematically
3) interview faculty, students, community partners, and staff to establish language and appropriate probes specific to the Wagner College and Staten Island context.

Civic Innovations has employed a multi-pronged assessment strategy. Recognizing that the program has potential impacts on faculty, students, community partners, and Wagner College and its institutional practices, we have sought to address each constituent in our assessment strategy. Throughout the three years we have collected data in the following ways:
1. faculty interviews
2. community partner interviews
3. observations of students in community settings
4. review of student work samples
5. interviews with Wagner College administrative staff
6. student surveys

All assessment activities were used as a means to document outcomes and inform program improvement activities.

Program Overview
Using the academic department as an organizing unit, Civic Innovations worked with departments throughout campus to develop a community partnership with a single youth serving organization on Staten Island. Several faculty within each participating department worked with their identified community partner to redesign their courses so that Wagner College students would have opportunities to apply knowledge in community settings and community partners would have the infusion of human and intellectual resources of Wagner College enabling them to better serve at-risk youth. In year one of Civic Innovations began with two "Community Connected" departments.

These teams of faculty identified a single youth serving community organization and met to identify mutual interests, critical needs, learning outcomes, and project ideas. These conversations resulted in redesigned curriculum that met the development needs of students and provided for curriculum connected to community identified concerns. In years two and three this partnership development model was refined and replicated to include six departments and more than 24 redesigned courses that all have community-based components.

Output Measures include:
- By the end of year three, 8,000 disadvantaged youth will receive consistent assistance and support from higher education students focused on increasing academic achievement, completing high school and pursuing a college education.
- By the end of year three, at least 1200 College students will participate in service-learning projects.
- By the end of year three, 1200 Wagner College students have participated in service-learning projects; department curriculum transformed.

The Civic Innovations program staff collected output data by working with faculty and community partners to count the number of participating college students and at-risk youth served. The strategic partnerships with youth serving organizations allowed the Civic Solutions program to easily achieve it goal of serving more than 8,000 disadvantaged youth. Primary partners include Project Hospitality, United Activities Unlimited, Hospitality House, Public School 57 and 16, Community Health Action YMCA programs, Liberian Youth programs, and the Port Richmond community. By engaging in tutoring, facilitating health advocacy programs, after-school programming, leading creative and intellectually stimulating programs, and community asset mapping youth were served throughout Staten Island. Each of these organizations serve many hundreds and youth in a variety of ways. Wagner College student and faculty engagement allowed these organizations to extend their services.

Engaging 1200 Wagner College students in course based service learning projects is a challenge. Wagner College has 2000 students. Over the three years of Civic Innovations eight departments and 32 classes have participating in projects that work with at-risk youth. Each class on average has not more than 20 students, thus approximately 640 Wagner College students have been involved in these curricular based service learning experience. In some ways the target of 1200 students was unrealistic given the size of the school. Yet, an additional several hundred students have been involved in co-curricular service activities that serve youth of Staten Island. These are not activities associated with the "Community Connected" department program but do illustrate the multi-faceted way that Wagner College students are engaged in important ways in the Staten Island community.

Intermediate Outcomes:
- By the end of year three, 80% of disadvantaged youth that participated in programming will report improved attitudes toward academic achievement and high school graduation, and the benefits of college attendance.

- By the end of Year Three, 85%of college students that participate in service-learning projects will increase their civic skills for civic engagement (as measured by a survey).

- By the end of year three, 24 new courses will have integrated service-learning.

Civic Innovations seeks to utilize the community-based learning experiences as a means to help students develop skills to be effective actors in civic affairs. The program would like to help students develop civic skills like effective communication in community settings, working on community concerns with diverse communities, and recognizing a sense of personal responsibility for addressing community concerns. Student survey results indicate:
- 66% of students said the community experience helped them learn effective communication strategies in community settings
- 58% of the students said the community experience helped them become more comfortable working with diverse communities
- 75% of students said they feel more able to engage in community problem solving as a result of their community experience
- 76% of the students involved this year think the work they did in the community benefited youth on Staten Island.

Interview data from community partners indicates as a result of Wagner College engagement they are:
- Able to serve more youth
- Able to provide more one on one attention to those most at risk
- Able to provide special programs that include health education, history education, personal finance workshops, physical education program after school, tutoring and mentorship
- Able to provide supervision for youth involved who are currently homeless while their parents attend adult education programs
- Support for youth who are affected by HIV/AIDS
- Able to provide programming for international youth who come from communities who have been disrupted by war

Wagner College students are working with youth who are experiencing the most difficult challenges. These youth are transient and often struggling academically and socially. Data collection on individual youth attendance and performance in programs is difficult to collect. There are modest indications that in some of the partnerships youth are staying at grade level and attending after-school programming regularly. These results are at least in part due to the programs that Wagner College students and faculty work in. But this data on individual students is limited and it is hard to be confident that these results are not due to chance or to other program factors.

As a result of these data collection challenges, a shift has been made to allow for assessment data to be collected at the organizational level. While this report is being written community partners surveys are being distributed to collect assessment data about

how Wagner College student and faculty involvement has affected the organization's capacity to better serve at risk youth. This data will be forthcoming.

End Outcomes:
- Disadvantaged youth will complete high school and pursue a higher education degree or seek employment.

- Long after the service-learning project is complete, participants will be active, competent, responsible and engaged citizens.

- By the end of year three, 16 institutions and organizations will have the internal capacity and external relationships sufficient to sustain meaningful levels of service-learning activities.

Interview and survey data clearly indicate that program stability and strengthened learning and community partner outcomes are substantially enhanced as the partnerships mature from one year to the next. Communication processes are established, a rhythm between course offerings and community needs is established, and a refining of developmentally sequenced projects for freshman through senior year is increasingly realized as the program has grown into its second year. Direct service like one-to-one youth mentoring and tutoring are ideal roles for freshman, while more complex youth serving community asset research projects done by seniors are the range of projects being facilitated through the Civic Innovations program. Assessment of community site impacts and data collection practices on how at-risk youth are benefiting as a result of partnerships with Wagner College as these relationships mature. Through interviews and attendance reports, one-on-one attention offered to youth through the program has been shown to improve youth behavior and improve academic performance. As a means to assess impact in the community the Civic Solutions team has worked with our community partners to gain access to youth educational success as documented by their school provided report cards. Report cards are being distributed at a time during this reporting cycle such that adequate analysis is not possible. Indicators of success are promotion to the next grade or a general raising of performance one-half a grade (New York City public schools use a 4-point system: 1 is failing; 2 are below average; 3 are doing grade-level work; 4 exceeds standards). All the kids in the after school programs are very low performing – 1's and 2's. Wagner students are an important part of the whole educational program – while the success of youth doesn't rest on Wagner student participation alone, they are an important part of the puzzle. An interview with one of the community partners involved in this program said, "these kids have no one at home to help, so the help that Wagner students can provide is essential to their success. They are role models, and their one-on-one with the kids makes a difference.

Student survey results provide the program with quantitative data about how student learning has been impacted as a result of their work in the community. 50% of the Wagner College students involved in the program this year report that the community experience they had helped them understand the course content and apply their knowledge to address community problems. 70% of the students report that they think community-based experiences should be a standard part of college course work. As the partnership matures from one year to the next, student report understanding how to make

the most of the applied educational experiences and faculty and community partners begin to further refine their expectations of students and each other. This continued partnership refinement along with the positive learning outcomes for students has solidified mutual commitments that have every expectation of being maintained overtime.

One of the primary Civic Innovations program goals is to address the educational, social, and stability of high risk youth on Staten Island. We are attempting to do that by supporting the programs for youth at Project Hospitality, area public schools, and community organizations that serve the Liberian community. During each year of the grant Civic Innovations provided assistance to youth by assisting in homeless shelters who serve women and children, providing mentoring and after-school and in-school student support, working in emergency food distribution centers that serve youth and families. 89% of students indicate they will continue to be involved in community activities after their course is complete. 78% of students report having a stronger sense of personal responsibility for the health of youth on Staten Island as a result of their community experiences. We see this as a strong indicator of continued engagement in the community.

Lessons Learned for Program Structuring

Departments who have thought about how to bring the partnership activities into curriculum that span all four years have increased outcomes for students.

Recognizing that what freshman can and should do with community partners is different than what sophomore, juniors and seniors can and should do. Those faculty that engaged the community organization in thinking creatively about how to utilize these students with increasingly complex projects see the best outcomes for students.

Those departments that saw their disciplinary learning goals being in part fulfilled through the applied projects done with the community partners were much more satisfied with the partnership. Faculty did not want to compromise their disciplinary goals simply to get their students involved in the community project.

Faculty who went out to the community site to see their students working with the community organization were able to understand how to assess student learning in the community context.

When students were able to discuss the work they were doing in the community in the classroom with fellow students and the faculty member, students were able gain a lot more from the community experience and were better able to resolve difficulties they experienced in the community.

Providing an opportunity for the community partner to get feedback from students on their experiences with their community site is something the community partner would like to see happen.

Community partners must provide an orientation for students prior to having the students work at their site. This orientation should provide a detailed description of the clients the community partner serves.

Students want to do something that is useful. Work with the community partner to ensure students will be actively engaged in a specific task when scheduled to work at the organization.

Faculty within the department who discuss ways they are connecting their various classes with a particular community partner have stronger curricular connections across the department and realize stronger learning outcomes for students.