Bridging Town and Gown: Community Partnerships, Student Engagement, and the Land-Grant Mission

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Three Partnerships: Working Toward the Common Good

- Students as Staff for the Town of Fincastle
- Town-Gown Partnership in Blacksburg: Professional Writing & Neighborhood Enhancement Programs
- VT Institute for Policy and Governance & Community Foundation of the New River Valley
Students as Staff for the Town of Fincastle
### Students as Staff for the Town of Fincastle

#### Process
- Initial contact through CDAC (1999)
- Internship and report
- Diane and Town agree on immediate and long-term planning needs and possible projects
- Diane establishes work program and integrates into classes; faculty technical assistance as part of outreach responsibilities
- Town approves work program each semester and makes requests as needs arise

#### Projects
- Community participation
- Plan development and plan updates
- Best practices reports
- Feasibility studies
- Buildout analysis, existing land use analysis
- Implementation tools
- Miscellaneous technical assistance

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[Virginia Tech logo]
Students as Staff for the Town of Fincastle

Benefits

• trust and honesty out of a long-term relationship
• complete understanding of Town needs, issues, concerns
• ability to devise a seamless series of student projects in advance -- good match with curricular needs
• opportunities for graduate students to do multiple projects (deep engagement)
  1st year spring – urban/regional studio
  2nd year fall – land use planning
  2nd year spring – final project
• Diane considered a member of the community (Fincastle Citizen Emerita awarded 2002)

Challenges

• limits to advice and recommendation by students and faculty
• volunteer-based small town government
• geographic distance
• matching student interests with Town needs
• project timing
## Town-Gown Partnership & Student Engagement

### Process

- **Before:** Met to discuss goals, develop projects, and discuss deadlines/schedules

- **During:** Introduce project to class, work with students, share notes and evaluations, present material, revise & edit material
  - Student tasks: Informal Proposal, Progress Report, Oral Presentations, Final Written Project

- **After:** Refine products, discuss results, use products; develop partnerships

### Products

- Neighborhood Beautification Program
  - Neighborhood Planning
  - Code Enforcement/Nuisance Abatement
  - Rental Inspection Program
Town-Gown Partnership & Student Engagement

Benefits

• Effect change & enact the land-grant mission
• Re-conceptualize research that involves and improves communities
• Promote co-learning and empowerment
• Revitalize civic traditions of public work
• Impact student perspectives
• Establish models for partnerships

Challenges

• Boundaries between Town and Gown
• Feedback
• Regaining Trust
University-Community / Organizational Partnerships

VT Institute for Policy & Governance (VT IPG) and Community Foundation of the New River Valley (CFNRV)
Organizational Partnerships: VT IPG & CFNRV

Process

• Knowledge and research
• Build community relationships
• Create a holding environment for others to engage in adaptive work & praxis

Products

• New Philanthropy Workshop
• Transatlantic Community Foundation Network Peer Exchange
• Third Thursday Society
• NRV Change Network
• NPO Governance Capacity Building
• Virginia Tech Arts Initiative
• Global Gathering
Organizational Partnerships:
VT IPG and CFNRV

Challenges

• Maintain informal, relaxed relationship
• Maintain balance among values, culture, skills, and structure of partnership
• Maintain praxis of action research
• Remain open to others
• Build trust and mutual respect