



Interfaith Community Forum

Promising Practice

Implemented by:
Hudson Valley Community College

Where:
The United States of America

Status:
Launched in March 2019

Summary:
The college gathers leaders from faith-based organizations to discuss the challenges their community members experience, the best practices that effectively address those issues, and what Hudson Valley Community College could do to assist.

Overview

Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC) is part of the State University of New York (SUNY), the largest comprehensive state university system in the United States of America. Nationally ranked for student success, HVCC is one of SUNY's most acclaimed colleges and offers more than eighty associate degrees and certificate programmes in the heart of New York's Capital Region.

Description

Cross-faith meeting

The first Interfaith Community Forum was held in the spring of 2019 on the Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC) campus. Leaders from over 100 faith organizations were in attendance to discuss the challenges their community members experienced, the effective practices in addressing those issues, and what Hudson Valley could do to assist.

Re-entry programmes

From the initial community discussion, HVCC focused on re-entry programmes and providing ESOL support for the refugee and immigrant population that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted.

Free ESOL instruction

The college is currently partnering with community organizations to offer free ESOL instruction with HVCC faculty because many of those organizations could not continue service due to a lack of resources caused by the pandemic.

Objectives

Historically, faith-based organizations have been a place of comfort and connection to opportunity within a community. Through partnering with faith-based organizations, the college can build these relationships based on trust. HVCC's community outreach targets adult learners, marginalized groups, and individuals from underrepresented groups whom these faith-based organizations often assist. Individuals from these marginalized groups often need to be made aware of

educational opportunities, workforce needs and workforce development programmes that can provide them with a sustainable career path. The college's relationship with local businesses and industry keeps it up to date regarding needs in the workforce.

Employment and development opportunities for individuals

Hudson Valley Community College is interested in exploring outreach to local communities, including faith-based communities, to determine how the college can better serve the region's educational and training needs.

Due to the overwhelming retirement seen in certain professions during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are shortages in the workforce in several occupations, including but not limited to Aviation Technicians, Electric and Autonomous Vehicle Technicians, Welders (to help build wind turbines) and Carpenters.

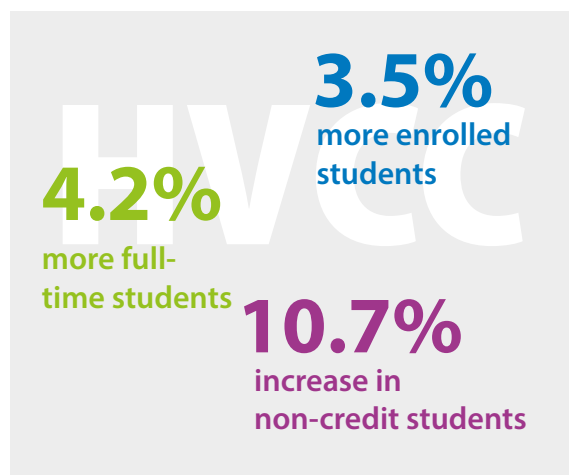
Through the college's relationships with faith-based organizations, information regarding the various certificate or degree programmes is disseminated to individuals interested in finding a sustainable career. HVCC is committed to meeting the needs of the community. Thus, faith-based leaders, who are on the "front lines", working with individuals and groups who are often undervalued, under-served, under-resourced and under-represented - are asked to share ways HVCC can expand programmes and services to meet community needs.

Hudson Valley Community College stays abreast of the workforce needs in the community and works to inform residents, starting in junior high school, of both the college's educational opportunities and the careers in high demand. The college has developed relationships with many not-for-profit and grassroots organizations (including faith-based organizations) that work with marginalized populations to inform the public of career opportunities. It is because of these relationships that the college remains authentic when addressing members of the community. This enables the college to develop meaningful connections with community members and bolsters its ability to create Human Capital in the community.

Outcomes and impact

Increased enrollment

At the height of the pandemic, HVCC continued to work with community partners in person when possible and virtually when it was not. Initiatives such as the Interfaith Community Forum are a significant reason why HVCC is one of the few educational institutions that have experienced two years of consistent growth since a low of 8,812 enrolled students in 2021. For the fall of 2023, HVCC is up 3.5% in headcount and 4.2% in full-time equivalent students – the calculation for all credits used for reimbursement by local and state governments. According to SUNY's enrolment projections for the fall of 2023, HVCC is now the largest community college in New York State, aside from two institutions located on Long Island. Non-credit offerings remain highly popular, with more than 6,300 students in 2023, a 10.7% increase over the previous year. HVCC remains a top provider of community, professional and workforce development courses.



Extensive collaborative relationships with community organizations

With leaders from more than 100 faith-based organizations attending the Forums, the college has developed a strong network that all the members can leverage to help achieve their goals and strengthen their communities. The Forums offer first-hand information regarding community members' many issues and concerns, including issues that HVCC may not have been previously aware of.

Challenges

Repercussions from the COVID-19 pandemic

Many organizations that provided educational support for marginalized groups lost their funding and audience during and after the pandemic. Hudson Valley Community College partnered with two organizations, Centro Civico and Refugee and Immigrant Support Services of Emmaus, Inc. (RISSE), to offer staff assistance and educational equipment.

Staying connected with faith-based community partners in between forums

The level of trust and commitment was established. Consequently, many of HVCC's faith-based partners are committed to the vision regarding access to education, especially for marginalized groups. The community sees that Hudson Valley is truly the community's college.

Insights

Several college faculty and staff members have spearheaded collaborative initiatives with community partners that have made this effort successful. Their efforts on behalf of Hudson Valley Community College President, Dr Roger A. Ramsammy, have allowed the college to build authentic relationships with community partners and have resulted in the college being asked to have representation on several boards of directors within the community.

Next steps

This ongoing initiative will continue to benefit the community, focusing on marginalized populations for the coming years.

Learn more

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