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# GRAND RAPIDS BUSINESS JOURNAL EXPRESS

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## Network Tracks Service Learning

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GRAND RAPIDS — Service learning, the term applied to engaging students in community projects, has become an essential component for colleges and universities in the Grand Rapids area, but until now, no one knew where the various service projects were taking place, who was being helped by them, and who still needed aid.

Now the Collegiate Network, a group of representatives from area colleges and universities, is recording, tracking and mapping service learning projects and determining where the service is still needed.

Representatives from Aquinas College, Calvin College, Cornerstone University, Davenport University, Grand Rapids Community College and Grand Valley State University have received a \$2,000 grant from Michigan Campus Compact to help improve their service learning programs and create a geographic information system map to determine where students are serving and what areas need more attention.

“We meet on a fairly regular basis to talk about what our colleges do on community-based work,” said Wayne Sneath, director of the Academic Service Learning Center for Grand Rapids Community College.

Sneath said the schools take part in a full spectrum of service projects, from long-term studies to one-day community cleanups by students.

As a new group, Sneath said, the Collegiate Network still needs to iron out the wrinkles and determine where it wants to go with the information it is compiling.

“Part of the purpose of the grant is to get a sense of cohesiveness with the group and where our goals are going to be,” he said.



The network was initiated when Sneath's colleague at GRCC, Assistant Director Mike Shavey, decided to call the other area colleges and universities to see if they were interested in discussing service learning.

"We're kind of still in the process of formulating the direction and vision of the Collegiate Network," he said. "I guess the goal is how we can work together to offer our students at each other's campus the best experience to be engaged in the community."

As of now, Shavey said, there are different definitions of service learning and civic engagement, and he hopes the network can come to a consensus on what they mean.

"Everybody's goal is the same: to engage students in the community," he said. "We're just all doing it differently."

Along with determining what should be done, the network also is determining where.

"We want to get a better idea where our students are doing their service," Shavey said. "Not only that, it helps us to see where we should be performing more service — what areas are being underserved."

The project is in collaboration with the Community Research Institute and the mapping is set to be finished in spring 2007.

Shavey said his goals for service learning are to make the students into more responsible citizens who take an active part in the community and in the democratic process.

"When people vote, they should have education and knowledge and experience to help frame their voting knowledge," he said. "People should be aware of what's going on in the community." BJB

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