SECOND ANNUAL YOUTHBUILD SYMPOSIUM AT TCNJ

The TCNJ Bonner Institute helped plan and hosted the statewide YouthBuild Symposium at TCNJ for a second year on December 5th. The Symposium was part of an effort to address the needs of young people in the State of New Jersey on the part of the Rutgers University Cornwall Center and the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General. The all-day conference welcomed over 75 YouthBuild program participants and coordinators from across the state. The focus of this year’s Symposium was navigating the world beyond YouthBuild. The College of New Jersey was a great setting for the event, as it gave the YouthBuild students an opportunity to see one of the state’s most highly ranked public institutions of the higher learning.

The Symposium began with a welcoming presentation by Wanda Moore of the NJ Office of the Attorney General, Karina Lopez of the TCNJ Bonner Institute for Civic and Community Engagement, and YouthBuild Founder and CEO, Dorothy Stoneman. Lopez, a Bonner Community Scholar alumni, set the tone for the day by speaking to the YouthBuild students about overcoming adversity and having the confidence to believe in their own ability to make a fruitful life for themselves. Lopez, who grew up in the foster care system, put herself through college and is now working full-time in the Bonner Institute, and is a testament to the power of determination and hard work.

YouthBuild students participated in a World Café session along with members of the Youth Vision Council and TCNJ Bonner Community Scholars. The World Café, facilitated by Kirk Lew, Policy Analyst at the NJ Department of Labor, engaged participants in small group discussions prompted by questions concerning the use of social media. A member of the Youth Vision Council and a Bonner Community Scholar co-facilitated the discussion, and helped students discuss how social media has an impact on their lives.

Following the World Café discussion, the YouthBuild participants enjoyed lunch in Eickhoff Dining Hall to show them what life is like on a college campus. In the afternoon, the attendees took part in interactive learning modules conducted by TCNJ faculty and community members. The workshops were tailored to the interests and needs of the YouthBuild participants based on their input prior to the conference. Topics included career development and exploration, parenting, financial literacy, finding your voice, life after YouthBuild, starting your own business, and social media. Overall, the modules helped the attendees explore opportunities for inclusion, greater community awareness, and respect.

YouthBuild is a national network of programs for low-income young people, ages 16 to 24, who work full-time for six to 24 months toward their GEDs or high school diplomas while learning job skills. TCNJ was a great setting for the symposium, as it provided YouthBuild students with an opportunity to travel to a different part of the state, and to experience a bit of college life.
The TCNJ Center for Community Engaged Learning & Research (CELR) connected Professor Chris Ault’s “Design Perspectives for Interactive Multimedia” class with the Trenton Downtown Association as part of new partnership aimed at rejuvenating the downtown area of Trenton.

Students in the Ault’s course worked collaboratively develop interactive multimedia projects - such as websites, mobile applications, and art installations - aimed at helping the community. Students have worked with local nonprofits including Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, to develop a digital interactive tour of the organization’s facility, and the Downtown Farmers Market to create a website, mobile app, and social media tools to promote group. Students also developed electronic window boxes to be installed in downtown storefronts, filling the windows with artificial flowers that light up at night. Ault sees the project as “an unusual idea that still gets at [the] widespread problem of keeping people in Trenton after 5:00pm.”

The Trenton Downtown Association’s (TDA) executive director, Christian Martin, is particularly interested in bringing the downtown area back to life after 5:00pm, when many state workers in the capitol city leave for the day. The CELR Center, in partnership with the TDA, will run evening programming out of TCNJ’s downtown office located at the corner of State and Broad streets in Trenton. The new initiative, TrentonWorks - TCNJ’s Innovation Foundry, seeks to widen the scope of programs offered by TCNJ to students and the larger community, while encouraging positive activity in the downtown area in the evening.

TCNJ and the TDA will continue to work on innovative projects through the TrentonWorks initiative by connecting the teaching and learning objectives of the College, such as Professor Ault’s class, to the needs of the community.

SNAPSHOT: DECEMBER 2013

Trenton Prevention Policy Board

The TPPB held its monthly meeting on December 9th, during which the six Working Groups met individually to discuss their ideas and recommendations, as well as implementation strategies. The board is TCNJ’s grassroots, policy initiative in partnership with the NJ Attorney General, to address juvenile delinquency in the city of Trenton. The Juvenile Delinquency group heard a presentation on the Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC), and the Health working group spoke with a representative from the Trenton Health Team. The Education working group and Employment group focused on their past initiatives, as well as where to go moving forward, given the resources available to them. The next working group meeting will take place in the new year on January 9th, and will focus on the recommendations and literature reviews to be included in the next report.

Community Engaged Learning Wrap Up

The Bonner Institute mobilized over 650 First Year students to complete their community engaged learning requirement during the fall 2013 semester. Students worked on beautification projects with the Environment team, they learned alongside inmates at Mercer County Correction Center with the Juvenile Justice team, helped teach ESL to Trenton residents with the Immigration team at El Centro de Recursos para Familias, spent the day with residents at Visitation Home and members of the Developmental Disabilities team, worked with local students alongside Bonner Scholars serving with the Education teams, and participated in numerous other projects. Overall, TCNJ students provided over 5,220 hours of service to the greater Trenton community. TCNJ students expressed their enthusiasm for the CEL experience, saying they “liked making a difference and working with a team,” and that they’ve “never met people as enthusiastic or committed as these Bonner students.” The successful first semester of this academic year set the tone for the spring, during which students will continue to serve and strengthen their community.

Design Perspectives in Trenton

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