

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST  
OFFICE OF THE FACULTY SENATE

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PRESENTATION BY JOHN REIFF, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE  
LEARNING AT COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE  
MISHY LEIBLUM, STUDENT BRIDGES GRADUATE COORDINATOR  
VANESSA SNOW, STUDENT BRIDGES UNDERGRADUATE COORDINATOR  
AYLA BAILEY, STUDENT BRIDGES INTERN  
“STUDENT BRIDGES & THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN  
COLLEGE ACCESS & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT”

A PDF version of his PowerPoint presentation is available at:

[http://www.umass.edu/senate/fs/minutes/2007-2008/student\\_bridges\\_powerpoint\\_665\\_10-04-07.pdf](http://www.umass.edu/senate/fs/minutes/2007-2008/student_bridges_powerpoint_665_10-04-07.pdf)

**John Reiff, Director of the Office of Community Service Learning at Commonwealth College**

I am John Reiff. I direct the UMass Office of Community Service Learning at Commonwealth College. We have that long name because we are both a program of Commonwealth College supporting community service learning, which is a core value of the Honor's College, and we are a resource for the entire campus, supporting faculty across the campus in honor's courses, outside honor's courses, undergraduate and graduate.

What is community service learning? Some of you know this. Some of you may not. So, I want to give you a quick thumbnail sketch of community service learning. It is the integration of community service and learning to enhance both. The learning enhances the service; the service enhances the learning. How does that happen, and especially what kind of learning happens in community service learning? Good community service learning has at least three different kinds of learning that happen for students: in an academic domain, in a personal domain, and in a civic domain. In the academic domain, students take theories from the classroom and see them illuminated by their experience in the community. They take experience from the community and use it to question theories and conceptual frameworks from the classroom. They practice skills that the classroom presents to them when they're working in the community. They also gain perspectives needed for democratic citizenship. They learn skills like collaboration, which is also needed for democratic citizenship, and they learn a lot about themselves: capacities, limits, what it looks like to try to apply your values in real life-challenging situations. This integrated learning leads students to invest more deeply in their education, and it is also a way that the University can fulfill part of our historic land-grant mission – to use knowledge to serve the people of the Commonwealth and the world.

Service learning, or community service learning, is part of a national movement for civic engagement in higher education. That movement really began to take steam in the mid-eighties when three university presidents came together to form an organization called Campus Compact to support service learning and community engagement in higher ed. That organization now has over eleven hundred colleges and universities that are members. Federal funding for service learning and civic engagement really took off in the early nineties when Congress created the Corporation for National and Community Service, which has provided grants to higher ed. institutions since 1994, and, UMass got one of those grants for \$375,000 in 2000-2003. On this campus, service learning began with individual faculty building community service into courses that they offered. One example that is still running since the early 1970s is the Boltwood Project, which was created by Merle Willmann, and he comes back from retirement to run that project every year, engaging students with folks with developmental disabilities.

The Teams Project has been doing tutoring up and down the Pioneer Valley since the early eighties. In the early nineties, then Provost Glenn Gordon created the Provost Committee on Service Learning

and gave that Committee some funds which have been renewed each year to support faculty in faculty fellowships to build community service into their courses. When Commonwealth College was created in 1999 – opened its doors in '99 – because community service learning was defined as a core value for the College, the Office of Community Service Learning was created and then directed to support all of you across the campus.

One of the conversations we have been having in Commonwealth College recently is about the idea of something we are calling Kids' College, an interrelated set of initiatives to support young people in developing a vision of college as part of their personal life vision and creating the means to have access to that vision. It is partly because of those discussions that, when I became aware of the Student Bridges program and what folks in that program were already doing, I saw it was very logical to connect Commonwealth College and its emphasis on service learning with this program. So, I want to turn the microphone over now to folks from Student Bridges, who will tell you a little about what that program is now doing.

**Mishy Leiblum, Student Bridges Graduate Coordinator**

Thank you John, and thank you to the Faculty Senate for this invitation to present about the program. My name is Mishy Leiblum. I am the Graduate Student Coordinator, and I was the student Trustee last year.

**Vanessa Snow, Student Bridges Undergraduate Coordinator**

I am Vanessa Snow. I am a junior, currently studying Social Thought and Political Economy, and I am one of the students who has been working with Student Bridges for the past two years.

**Ayla Bailey, Student Bridges Intern**

My name is Ayla. I am also in the Social Thought and Political Economy program, and I have also been involved with Student Bridges. This is my second year now.

**Student Bridges Graduate Coordinator Leiblum**, We are just going to do a brief overview of the program. We are going to talk a little about how we have collaborated with the Office of Community Service Learning, and we are also going to talk about the course that we host, which is a General Education requirement course also listed through the Office of Community Service Learning.

**Student Bridges Undergraduate Coordinator Snow**, Student Bridges is a student-initiated outreach program that connects UMass students with local, community-based organizations and schools through academic mentoring, tutoring, programming and policy advocacy, and we currently work with Holyoke, which is a racially diverse, post-industrial town thirty minutes away. We were created in the fall of 2005. It was a group of students working within the Student Government Association and also with the Student Center for Educational Research and Advocacy, trying to come up with a student-initiated response to increase college access and college awareness with the youth in the surrounding area.

**Student Bridges Graduate Coordinator Leiblum**, Many of you may know that Student Bridges came out of funding for the Office of ALANA Affairs. For years, the Student Government Association funded an advocacy agency for ALANA students. That Office was transferred over to the Center of Student Development, and that was kind of the genesis of this program. So, as Vanessa mentioned, when we were developing the program, we met with dozens of faculty, dozens of community organizations, and we selected Holyoke for three main reasons. One, the city is very close to the University. However, the rate of students in Holyoke, and residents in Holyoke, that have a Bachelor's degree is very low compared to, for example, the rate in the greater Boston area. Second, we were very impressed by and drawn to the fact that Holyoke has an intensive city-wide initiative to improve college access and to really look at a cradle to career approach to educational attainment in the city. And, the director, Isolda Ortega Bustamante has been a very strong supporter of Student Bridges, and we have worked closely in collaboration with that initiative, which is based out of Holyoke Community College. She is actually here with us right now. Third, the city itself has a

tremendous amount of assets that really provide a solid foundation for partnerships between students, student organization, faculty, and other departments on campus.

We have a chart that, again, just kind of highlights the fact that the school system in Holyoke, the public school system, is struggling, and compared to state-wide averages, the percent of students – particularly Latino students in Holyoke – that have left high school is much higher than statewide averages. So, that is also one particular area that we thought would be important for partnership work, particularly when we are looking at college access.

I will note, before we move on, that these rates are very similar throughout Hampden County. So, if you look at rates in Springfield and if you look at rates in Chicopee, there are also very high drop-out rates. We are very interested in collaborating and working with other faculty and departments to collaborate with the brand new Hampden County working group on drop-out preventions. So, that working group has participation from the Chicopee Public Schools Department, the Holyoke Public Schools Department, Springfield Public School Departments, a range of community-based organizations, including the MLK Community Center in Springfield, ENLACE and Holyoke Community College.

Student Bridges Intern Bailey, Student Bridges has three main components. We have the college preparatory academic tutoring/mentoring piece, which means that we place undergraduate students and a couple of graduate students in tutoring positions around Holyoke. We have the Community Outreach and College Awareness Program. Student Bridges has worked in collaboration with a variety of five college students and community organizations to provide academic awareness and college preparatory workshops to local youth and community organizations. Additionally, we have the policy and advocacy piece. We work with faculty, community organizations, student organizations, and state-wide coalitions, PHENOM, which is a state-wide initiative on education to advocate for increased access to higher education for underrepresented students in this area, specifically, and state-wide.

We have a tremendous amount of partnership in the five colleges, in the community and in Holyoke as well. We placed tutors in a whole different place. One of them is the STEP afterschool program, which is a skills, training, and enrichment program, which happens in Holyoke middle schools. We place tutors in the Lynch Middle School in the actual classrooms with students doing one-on-one tutoring. We place tutors with the adult education program which is based out of Holyoke Community College and focuses on transitioning adults into college who have been out of school for a long time. We run, in coordination with the Five College Partnership – which has just lost grant funding – a series of workshops for community-based youth programs in the area, and that is through the five colleges. We work with the AVANZA College Program which is a program of HCC and ENLACE, Engaging Latino Communities for Education, doing outreach evaluation and talking about pathways to college with youth. And, we work through Holyoke Community College, doing outreach tabling and talking to a lot of different bridge groups that work from community college to four-year programs. We are sort of ambassadors in some of those programs.

Student Bridges Graduate Coordinator Leiblum, We have mentioned before that this is a student-funded initiative. So, the Student Government provides a hundred percent of the funding for the program. However, we have been very fortunate to be able to have a strong collaboration with Commonwealth College and with the Office of Community Service Learning, and they have been willing to host a four-credit honors, General Education course, which really provides the backbone for our program. Again, we have a team of paid staff. This is the first semester that we are using this course number. Last year, when we piloted the program, we had a temporary course number, and we had also arranged independent study and internship credits for participating students. So, we are particularly excited to share this with the Faculty Senate, particularly because we know that there is an initiative to look at General Education requirements and to look at ways to kind of enhance the General Education program at the University. We feel like Student Bridges has really been a meaningful General Education requirement that has really been able to, again, integrate community service learning.

As part of this, we have been able to integrate kind of unique components. For example, part of this course involved a mandatory, day-long orientation that was hosted in collaboration with the Five College Community Based Learning Committee and in collaboration with, again, ENLACE – which, again, is Engaging Latino Communities for Education. What this did was it brought together nearly a hundred students from all five colleges to talk a little about the history of the city of Holyoke, to talk about some of the community's assets, and to hear from other students who had been engaged in community service learning in this city.

What we have heard through students' logs and reflections is that the course really works, and that students are taking a tremendous amount from this program and specifically from the academic part of this component. Here are some testimonies from students' reflections papers, and also Vanessa and Ayla are just going to speak for a moment about their experience working in the program, taking the course.

Student Bridges Undergraduate Coordinator Snow, Being a student in the course has been an amazing experience. I am coming from a highly theoretical major which does not really give that much space to think about how to take that theory into my work post-college. Doing Student Bridges has really helped me think about how to put that theory into possible careers. Right now I am thinking about education and public policy. It really has kind of bridged that gap and really has gotten me to think about how I can use my experiences in the classroom, but then also the experience in the community, and how that will help me pursue my professional life after UMass.

Student Bridges Intern Bailey, Student Bridges has been, I think, one of my favorite courses. It is challenging, sort of, in classroom experience, as well as a challenging time commitment. Not only is it the class, but it is one or two times tutoring per week plus transportation to and from Holyoke. So, what I found is that the students in the class are really amazing. They are often times really dedicated, and not just to being in the class and actively participating, but really creating a community and working towards a higher vision of access to higher education and our place in that as students already in higher education and how we have got there. Then, doing the hands-on experience is like coming from a place where I have been able to get access education and understanding a little bit more of the political economy of the area and of the state, and then being able to work hands-on with folks who are working towards that is really valuable for me.

Student Bridges Graduate Coordinator Leiblum, We know that we are pressed for time, but we just want to talk a little bit about, again, what role faculty can play in supporting this program and supporting, again, this intersection between civic engagement and college access.

Number one is, again, we are really interested in what work faculty are already doing, what kind of academic interest, research interest, teaching interest that might be able to intersect with College Access. We also do a tremendous amount of tours. We have brought in hundreds of youth for tours on campus in collaboration with the Visitor's Center and Undergraduate Admissions, and, as part of those events, we sometimes have students sit in on the classes or have special workshops for students, and we are always looking for faculty support in that area and development assistance. So, again, I have mentioned, last year was the very first year for the program. Everything that you have seen, everything that we have talked about, has all really kind of congealed in the course of, really, two semesters. So, we are looking to expand. Again, we know that right now the course is filled and we have a waitlist, so we have twenty-five students plus half a dozen students on independent and internship credits. We are really interested in working more in Springfield and working more in Chicopee, particularly, again, with this Hampden Country drop-out prevention group. But, in order to do that we need financial support. And, we also need support in terms of looking at ways to strengthen partnerships with the University as a whole and with local public school departments. Last year, we got a grant from the Massachusetts Campus Compact to map the campus' current college access activities, and we found that Student Bridges is right now the only program that directly provides support around college awareness and college preparation for local students. We know that the University used to host Upward Bound, used to host Talent Search, but grants have

**been shifted, funding has been lost, so right now we are the only intentional direct college awareness and college access program on the campus.**

**We encourage questions. Again, we are really brand new. We have information in the back of the room. We invite you to visit our web site, which was just posted about a month ago, and to talk to us. We also have two interns in the back who can help answer questions.**