Partners in NCA’s *Communicating Common Ground* gather in Atlanta

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“If communication is about anything, it’s about building common ground between groups.”

– Jim Applegate, NCA Immediate Past President

The seeds of the national service-learning initiative, *Communicating Common Ground*, are beginning to bear fruit. Two years ago at the NCA national convention, Jim Applegate envisioned a project that would blossom into a collaboration between NCA, the Southern Poverty Law Center, Campus Compact, and the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE). The program supports partnerships between the communication discipline and community-based institutions for the purpose of addressing diversity in a multicultural society through engaged scholarship.

**CCG in Atlanta**

The second invitational orientation and training for new partners held at Atlanta was met with excitement and success. Nine new partners joined the 25 second-year partners.

Edward Zlotkowski of AAHE and Campus Compact opened the workshop, discussing the fundamentals of community-based learning. He challenged participants to ask how they can make use of what they are teaching during any given semester to help students’ process what is happening in their daily lives. According to Zlotkowski: “Service-learning offers faculty the opportunity to foster learning that tests theory in practice.” Zlotkowski explained that the three primary characteristics of service-learning are: 1) direct experience working with the community in promoting the common good, 2) carefully designed reflection on the activity, and 3) planned reciprocity with the community partners. He highlighted the importance of the reflection and the need to push faculty and their students beyond their stereotypes by seeking to clarify the mental models of those with whom they work.

During the second part of the afternoon, Jim Carnes of the Southern Poverty Law Center highlighted diversity and the importance of engaging in antibias and multicultural education. He stressed the necessity of CCG partners taking the time to become aware of their own identity as leaders of the project and then helping students to ask the question: Who are we, as a group, going into this project?

Carnes cautioned partners to be wary of the hidden “do good” mentality, and challenged them to move beyond the model of volunteerism and into mutually beneficial relationships with community partners that are sustainable over time.

Kathryn Sorrells and Gordon Nakagawa of California State University at Northridge concluded the diversity discussion by sharing their experiences with service-learning.

**New CCG Leadership Team**

A business meeting of all CCG participants wrapped up the orientation/training event. At the meeting, a new leadership team was chosen that includes Barbara Clinton as task team coordinator and NCA members Detine Bower, Huston-Tillotson College; Ann Burnett, North Dakota State University; Claire Deal, Hampden-Sydney College; Mary Eicholtz, University of Arkansas-Little Rock; Colleen Garside, University of Utah; Cheryl Lossie, Edinboro University; Dreama Moon, California State University, San Marcos; Karen Sindelar, Coe College; Kathryn Sorrells, California State University, Northridge; Deb Wooldridge, Coe College; Lori Walters-Kramer, SUNY-Plattsburgh; Mike Waltman; University of North Carolina; and Shirley Willihnganz, University of Louisville.

Information on the Communicating Common Ground project, along with a list of resources, can be found at [http://www.natcom.org/instruction/CCG/ccg.htm](http://www.natcom.org/instruction/CCG/ccg.htm).

**Supporters acknowledged**

The new CCG Leadership Team acknowledges Kathryn Sorrells for planning a successful 2001 workshop for the first- and second-year CCG partners, and Sherry Morreale in the NCA National Office for her continued commitment and support of this work. As Jim Applegate said, “This is an exciting project. One of our reasons to be, as the academy, must be to create better lives for the people we serve.” The Communicating Common Ground project certainly provides NCA with the opportunity to do just that.