

# HISTORY AND PROCESS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEACE AND JUSTICE STUDIES ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAM AT NASHUA COMMUNITY COLLEGE (NASHUA, NEW HAMPSHIRE)

## INTRODUCTION

Planning for a new academic program must take into account the history, the traditions, and the milieu of the college at which the faculty desire to introduce the program.

The following account details the history and process used at Nashua Community College (Nashua, New Hampshire) for the development of the Associate in Arts Degree in Liberal Arts – Peace and Justice Studies Concentration. As a small institution of 1,800 students, we tend to operate in a very flexible fashion. This flexibility allowed the program to be developed in a relatively short period of time.

## STEP ONE (Early to mid October 2007)

The impetus for the program began in October 2007 when an adjunct faculty member made an appointment with the College President to discuss an idea about creating a Peace and Justice Studies (P&JS) program. With very few programs of this nature in the USA offered by community colleges, and with only one community college program in New England at Greenfield Community College (Greenfield, Massachusetts), the faculty member thought a P&JS program would provide a unique opportunity for the College.

The president was very excited about the idea of promoting a program in social justice as it was congruent with the College's commitment to service to the community and to the nation.

During a second meeting between the faculty member and the president, the chair of the liberal arts department was asked to join the discussion. With the chair's expertise in curriculum design, the president wanted another view as to the appropriateness of such a program. The department chair also saw this opportunity as important to the College.

With financial support from the College, the faculty member attended the Peace and Justice Studies Association conference in Portland, Oregon in late October to use this network to research current programs and trends. The faculty member has continued to maintain her connections with this group.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- It is very important to have support from senior leaders at the institution. Instead of a bottom-to-top approval process, presidential support helps to assure that the proposal will be taken seriously and given proper consideration.
- It is important to determine the scope of a program in P&JS. Should the program be offered as a certificate or as a degree program? Beyond students enrolled in the program,

which students in which other programs might enroll in specific courses of P&JS? The focus of the program will help drive curriculum frameworks.

- It is also important to be very aware of trends in the field of P&JS. What are the current and emerging concerns that interested parties see for the future? These trends need to be included in the curriculum design.
- Use the expertise of a curriculum developer early to avoid false directions and to determine how much curriculum work is needed to create a new program. If the curriculum developer is a respected faculty member who also serves on the institution's Curriculum Committee, so much the better for the process.

#### STEP TWO (Middle of October 2007 – December 2007)

Before taking additional steps, it was important to decide the focus of the P&JS proposal. Would the program, in the classical sense of a liberal arts education, focus on world peace and justice, or would some other focus be more appropriate? After much discussion, a decision was reached that Nashua Community College did not have a sufficient number of full-time faculty members in the various fields necessary to present a comprehensive world-view of P&JS.

The department chair suggested that a P&JS program would provide a wonderful opportunity for a community college to provide new linkages with the community through a community-based program of study. Working with community agencies, schools, police departments, and the court system, the P&JS program could prepare students and others in the community to help create an atmosphere of peace and social justice for people living in the community. In this way, the College would act as a catalyst for change and improvement in the community.

The faculty member had a number of conversations with faculty members at four-year institutions seeking letters of support for the proposed P&JS program. Letters of support were received from Rivier College and Plymouth State University.

#### Lessons Learned

- Even though an interesting idea for a new program might be presented, it is important to determine if the proposed program is congruent with the mission and vision of the College. In the case of Nashua Community College, P&JS will reinforce the notion that the College is a partner involved with the community, not merely a college existing in the community.
- Even at this early stage, it is evident that the success of a P&JS program depends on many linkages within the community. It is important to develop a preliminary list of such partners as early as possible in the process. As the program develops, college personnel may find that unusual and unanticipated supporters may appear.
- Letters of support for a P&JS program are useful to present to a Curriculum Committee in terms of the ease by which credits may be transferred to the four-year institutions.

### Step Three (January 2008 – early April 2008)

While the president, the faculty member, and the department chair thought this proposal made sense on several levels, it was important to seek an outside view of the concept developed to date. To organize the effort, a Program Advisory Committee (PAC) was established with representation from two, four-year liberal arts colleges in the region, a guidance counselor from a local elementary school with which the College already had a long-term relationship, a representative from the office of a federal congressman, and a district judge with much experience in the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders.

The name of the proposed program was discussed and settled as a first step with the PAC. We discussed the fact that a community cannot have peace with justice. The name helped to provide direction in terms of the courses that would be developed.

In retrospect, however, we should have considered the implications of the program name as P&JS. The connotations that some in the community have is that the P&JS program is related to the study of criminal justice. In the future, the College will consider a name change to “Peace and Social Justice”; for the time being, however, the name will remain as “Peace and Justice Studies.”

In anticipation of the first meeting, a set of course outlines were prepared. The availability of course descriptions, course outcomes, and course activities proved to be very important to connect concepts with anticipated outcomes.

By the end of the first meeting of the PAC, the strategy of thinking locally and acting locally was the direction chosen. Suggestions for the inclusion of additional organizations and other interested individuals were presented.

During a second and third meeting, revisions to the curriculum were presented and approved.

To make contacts with other peace advocates, and to obtain professional support from other P&JS faculty members teaching in the field, the faculty member attended regional meetings of the New England Peace Studies Association.

Even before a viable proposal was completed, the faculty member formed the Student Peace Alliance Club at the College. By involving students at the beginning of the program development, interest in enrolling in the P&JS program would be easier to obtain.

### Lessons Learned

- A Program Advisory Committee is very important to determine if support can be

obtained for this type of program. Members of the PAC were able to cast a broader net of interested parties that can contribute to the success of the program.

- The members of the PAC have been very helpful to make College officials aware of trends in their communities of interests. This is very useful to prevent wrong directions and a lack of understanding about certain activities in the community.
- The early development of course outlines allows members of the PAC and College officials to make a commitment to a direction for the program. Rather than attempting to develop curricula as a group endeavor, it is much easier to react to an already developed proposal. Concerns are addressed quickly and efficiently using this approach.
- Be very careful as to the name chosen for the program. It is worthwhile to create a few focus groups to obtain reactions to the proposed name.

#### STEP FOUR (May – August 2008)

The Summer of 2008 was spent understanding the rhythm of the College and the steps needed to introduce the P&JS program. Who were the main “players” at the College and in the community who had the vision and the willingness to help make this program a reality? The department chair assisted the faculty member to create an action plan: identify the individuals within the College who would assist the effort; identify the individuals within the College who might present obstacles and work to minimize their objections; and identify organizations and people in the community who have an interest in supporting peaceful communities.

Much time was spent developing a strategy to have people in the community believe that Nashua Community College was in a position to exercise leadership in setting the agenda for a more peaceful and socially just community. Although the College had no experience with this type of program, the president viewed P&JS as a new venture that would positively impact the daily lives of citizens of the region in same way that programs in Early Childhood Education, Nursing, and Human Services support members of the community.

To assist with the development of the P&JS program, David Smith of the United States Institute of Peace was invited to the College to meet with the Program Advisory Committee, students at the College, and citizens from the community. He was very supportive of our unique approach to a P&JS initiative

To gain internal and external support for the P&JS Program, the program was introduced to the College’s Curriculum Committee at this time for informational purposes, not for approval of the program. With the Curriculum Committee’s informal support, the program was included as a “Proposed Program for Fall 2009” in the 2008 – 2009 College *Catalog*. Using this technique, the program had the advantage of being marketed a year in advance of the start of the program. In anticipation of providing support to individuals and groups in the community, the faculty member made application to attend CRETE (Conflict Resolution Education for Teacher

Education) training. Because of the faculty member's background, and because of the contacts she had already made, the application was approved. Four days of training occurred in Ohio in June 2008, and four additional days of training were completed in August 2008 in Maryland;

In May, the faculty member attended a meeting at Plymouth State University for those interested in creating a collaboration of higher education faculty members in NH to create a culture of peace.

To show administrative support for the proposed program, the president appointed the faculty member as a part-time Program Coordinator of the P&JS Program. With this type of commitment, the faculty member spent her summer starting to meet and visit with many people in Nashua, the State of NH, and around the USA. Since Summer 2008, the faculty member has met new friends for the P&JS Program in many venues: Nashua Mediation Center, a local four-year college and a local university, Adult Learning Center, Ethnic Awareness Committee of Nashua and its subcommittee called the Disproportionate Minority Contact Committee, Granite State Organizing Project, PeaceJam, NH Department of Peace Campaign, NH Peace Action, Alternatives to Violence Project, NH Minority Health Coalition, Help Increase the Peace Program (HIPP) National Committee, Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management, and the Peace and Justice Studies Association.

To promote the new program internally, the faculty member very proactively participated in Open Houses and Freshman Orientation Sessions. The faculty member also "nagged" the Public Relations Officer for program brochures and feature articles to be sent to local newspapers. Without the faculty member's persistence, fewer brochures and fewer public relations pieces would have been written. These efforts continue to ensure effective marketing of the P&JS program.

To demonstrate the College's commitment to the philosophy of peace and justice, and to publicize the College's emerging commitment to P&JS, the faculty member in July 2008 offered a two week seminar at the College using the principles of the Alternatives to Violence Project, an internationally recognized training program. The AVP program was well-received, and the College received positive publicity about the proposed P&JS Program. It was gratifying to find people, committed to peace initiatives, who provided scholarships so people without the financial resources could attend the AVP program.

### Lessons Learned

- Friends and allies are found in unusual places. The faculty member learned not to forego opportunities to make contacts and friends for the P&JS program and related activities. One person or group leads to opportunities with other people or groups.
- The person leading the development of the P&JS program must be realistic in terms of

- what can be accomplished in a specific period of time. Establish a timeline with measurable goals, and stay with the plan.
- It is important to gain support from faculty members at the College before the proposal is forwarded to the Curriculum Committee for a vote. People on campus speaking well about the proposed program will make the case easier when a vote is taken by the Curriculum Committee.
- Be bold and enthusiastic about a P&JS program. If one shows lukewarm enthusiasm, recipients of the message will feel likewise.
- Take every opportunity to promote the new program. Within obvious limits, go everywhere and anywhere where people will listen to the message. Passivity will not create a viable program.
- Do not assume that people at the institution are as enthusiastic about the proposal as are the program advocates. Take the time to build internal support for the program.
- Do not assume that a marketing or recruitment budget and/or staff time is allocated to support the P&JS proposal. Much of this effort may become the responsibility of those developing the program. Ask early in the development process what staff and/or resources are to be committed as the proposal moves forward.

#### STEP FIVE (September – December 2008)

During this period, the faculty member attempted to have three PAC meetings. Attendance at these meetings became weaker as the semester continued.

The P&JS proposal was sent to the Curriculum Committee in October 2008. Because of the early introduction of the program to the Curriculum Committee, and because of the support that had been gained from its members, the proposal was approved without any suggestions for modification.

The faculty member continued to attend meetings and conferences to network with others who might provide support to the P&JS program.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

- Be careful to limit the number of meetings for the PAC. While College personnel may devote a significant amount of time to program development, advisory committee members will not have the same amount of time to commit. Once the initial work is complete, one advisory committee meeting per semester should be sufficient. E-mail is a good tool to use to keep PAC members informed of progress being made.

## STEP SIX (January – May 2009)

The department chair “pushed” the faculty member to again create a realistic timeline of activities. As was the case with Rome, it takes more than a few months to build an empire.

The faculty member spent time creating a high school database of guidance counselors and sent information about the P&JS program to them. An e-mail blast was sent to organizations in the region through Service Learning contacts.

In early March, the faculty member presented the P&JS program to the members of the Board of Trustees who enthusiastically offered support to the program. By having the faculty member introduce the P&JS program to the Board, the president again showed strong administrative support for this type of academic program.

In mid March, students of the Student Peace Alliance Club and the History Club went to Washington, D.C. In addition to meeting with congressional delegation representatives, the nine students also attended the national Department of Peace Conference. The College’s delegation was the largest student group from any college in attendance.

Also in March, the faculty member attended the National Peace Academy Summit at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. Very few community college personnel were invited to attend this conference. By this point, the faculty member was being viewed as important to the movement to add P&JS type of programs at community colleges across the country.

In April, the faculty member presented a peace-building workshop at the Regional PeaceJam Conference at Elms College in Holyoke, MA.

The faculty member in April attended the first conference in NH at Plymouth State University to address peace: The Role of NH Higher Education in Creating a Culture of Peace. She shared resources and contact information. The members of the conference unanimously passed a motion in support of the US Department of Peace bill, HR 808.

Also during this semester, the faculty member was a presenter at the New England Regional Campus Compact Conference at University of Massachusetts – Amherst. In the afternoon of the conference, representatives of twelve colleges and universities met to discuss community service and P&JS types of program. It was interesting to learn that the faculty member had already made significant contacts with organizations and people about whom other college representatives knew very little. By this point, the faculty member had become a resource for others.

In May, the faculty member offered a four-day CRETE training program at the College to twenty-four diverse members of the community. As a result, Nashua Community College became the first community college in the USA and the first institution of higher education in New England to offer this training.

To continue to provide support to P&JS activities, the president spoke to the group and urged them to continue to meet at the College. Several participants expressed a serious interest in enrolling in the P&JS program at the College. Teachers and others involved in the training now could spread the message that the College was positioned well to offer a P&JS degree program.

The CRETE program provided newspaper coverage, good public relations, and curriculum materials to support the College's teacher education department.

Throughout this semester, the department chair was becoming increasingly concerned about the enrollment of students in the P&JS degree program. It was time to redirect all other efforts toward enrollment. With many community college students traditionally making a late decision to attend college, panic had not set in yet. Nevertheless, the original objective was to develop and implement an associate degree program in P&JS.

#### LESSONS LEARNED:

- In this emerging field of study at the community college, it is relatively easy to enter the network of individuals involved with peace studies. If the faculty member's experience is typical, these people are very willing to share their knowledge in a most selfless manner.
- So many events, meetings, conferences, etc. are available in this field that faculty members must be judicious as to the number and types of activities with which to become involved. The nature of the proposed program should guide early involvement in professional development activities.
- It is important for college administrators to provide adequate start-up funds to develop a P&JS program. Attendance at professional meetings, out-of-state travel funds, and related expenses are a good investment to ensure that best practices are incorporated into the program design.
- Finally, keep your focus on enrollment as a primary goal. While other activities are interesting and important for future relationships, program enrollment is fundamental. Do not lose track of the primary objective.
- Do not assume that others at the college have lists of contacts in an easy-to-find format. Those promoting the new program may have to develop these lists themselves.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Professor Arthur Harris, Chairperson, Liberal Arts Department

Professor Barbara Thorngren, Peace and Justice Program Coordinator

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