

COMMUNITY BUILDERS: FOSTERING INTERGENERATIONAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community Builders: Fostering Intergenerational Civic Engagement is an ongoing collaborative experiential learning project in which Wartburg College students work with elementary students, adolescent youth, and senior citizens to meet the mutually reciprocal needs of all the collaborating partners. The purpose of this project is to use the assets of community members with different cognitive, social, civic, and intergenerational backgrounds and skills to build and strengthen the community they share. These “community builders” are individuals who learn from one another in the quest to attain this common goal while developing and enhancing their own respective skill sets, which add value to their individual lives and the larger communities of which they are a part. Beyond the learning that takes place regarding the value of community, these engaged citizens contribute to the strengthening of community by undertaking the project goals articulated. This creation of “social capital” is consequential to the health and well-being of a democratic society.

The project has three interrelated and mutually reinforcing goals. The first is to build intergenerational learning communities designed to develop and practice the skills of civic engagement and appreciate the value that it can add to the life of the individual citizen. The second is to address specific educational needs and interests of all participants in the project, including enhanced Internet skills, reading skills, social and civic skills, and the skills of critical inquiry—all significant attributes to sustainable democratic society. The third is to recognize and use the multifaceted talents and skills that each participant brings to the project. The rationale for identifying these three objectives is to help participants appreciate that healthy, positive communities depend on the recognition that all individuals have needs that communities can help satisfy. Simultaneously, all community members have the capacity to contribute to the quality of community life and deserve the opportunity to do so.

Wartburg participation falls within two contexts: primary participants and secondary participants. The primary participants are students working under the supervision of faculty in the sociology, and leadership programs. These students are direct participants in the learning communities throughout the project. The secondary participants are students who work under the supervision of the community service coordinator and faculty in the mathematics & computer Science and communication arts programs to provide logistical and technical support to the work of the learning communities. This includes the development and maintenance of an Internet home page which serves as a communications tool for the project.

Community Builders was initiated in the fall of 2001 through a grant from the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education. Ongoing costs of the project are met by the various constituent partners.