



THE HOLLERAN CENTER
FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Strategic Plan 2012-2017

Revised December 2013

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Part 1: Mission & Vision

Mission Statement of the Holleran Center

Guided by Franciscan values and the ideal of “knowledge joined with love,” The Holleran Center for Community Engagement (HCCE) strives to be the catalyst and central resource for Alvernia’s role as a national leader in civic engagement and community service. As a bridge between the University and the community, The Holleran Center cultivates and sustains strategic partnerships in order to strengthen campus and community life. The Center’s programs and activities are intended to foster in Alvernia’s students and, indeed, in all participants a life-long dedication to service and a commitment to being ethical leaders with moral courage.

Vision Statement of the Holleran Center

The Holleran Center will:

- Form and inform the University’s understanding of and response to the needs in the community.
- Initiate strategic partnerships that enhance Alvernia's mission, leverage campus and community expertise, address community needs and produce mutually beneficial results;
- Serve as the central resource for students, faculty, and staff to engage in Community-Based projects and as a catalyst for expanding Community-Based learning of all types, including internships, field experiences, Service-Learning, and Community-Based Research projects;
- Serve as the central point of access for the community to campus resources and serve as an incubator for projects to address community needs;
- Establish Alvernia University as a leader in Community-Based learning and civic engagement- locally, regionally and eventually nationally.

Part 2: Environmental Scan

The Holleran Center for Community Engagement (HCCE) has grown rapidly in recent years, especially following its endowment by the Holleran family in 2008. The South Reading Youth Initiative is becoming well-known for offering consistently high-quality programming to students in the City, Service-Learning courses have been increasing in both quantity and quality, and the engagement of a series of excellent AmeriCorps VISTA workers has greatly enhanced the ability of HCCE to provide quality service to Alvernia students and to respond to needs in the community.

While there are certainly challenges to HCCE's continued development, there are a tremendous number of opportunities which provide the foundation for a strategy of growth and more impactful programming to improve campus and community life.

Key Highlights: Challenges and Opportunities

External Challenges

1. A "culture of uncertainty" in substantial parts of the community, sometimes making it difficult to form lasting partnerships with local organizations.
2. Steadily declining resources available to community partners.

Internal Challenges

1. Struggle to gain attention on a campus with a lot of activities going on simultaneously.
2. Some confusion about which campus organizations play what roles in regards to service.
3. Time resources are often stretched thin for students, staff and faculty, resulting in lower than desired levels of participation in service activities.

Opportunities

1. The ability to integrate student Community Service to the work of HCCE.
2. Central office location facilitating student interaction.
3. Proximity to Angelica Park
4. Excellent brand value and awareness of HCCE in the community.
5. Students coming on campus are increasingly familiar with and ready to engage in Community Service.

Part 3: History and Present Conditions

During his inaugural speech in 2006, then Alvernia College President Thomas Flynn established two Centers of Excellence: a Center for Community Engagement and a Center for Leadership and Ethics. The Board of Trustees reaffirmed this commitment to community engagement in the Alvernia Strategic Plan in 2007. The following year, Alvernia University received its largest philanthropic and naming gift from T. Jerome and Carolyn Holleran, thus providing the Holleran Center for Community Engagement, a foundation for its growth and success.

In 2012, the Holleran Center has several established and signature activities which are well-known, significant to the life of the university, and which have nurtured substantial partnerships with organizations in the Greater Reading community. At the end of the 2010-2011 academic year, the staff of the Holleran Center included a full-time Director, a full-time Project Coordinator, a full-time South Reading Youth Initiative Program Manager, and an Associate Director who received a two-course release from her duties as a faculty member to support Service-Learning. At the beginning of the fall semester of 2011, a full-time Community Engagement Coordinator was added, as was a part-time Environmental Sustainability Coordinator. In addition, the Holleran Center was awarded an AmeriCorps VISTA grant through Pennsylvania Campus Compact, which supports a full-time Alvernia READS Program Manager.

Current Programs:

The South Reading Youth Initiative

- Created in 2006 to counteract the poor attrition rates in the City of Reading. SRYI provides after-school educational programming as well as cultural experiences for elementary and middle-school students in the South Reading area. Currently providing services at St. Peter's Catholic Church four days each week to 75 children, with approximately 50 students present for programming each day.
- In addition to after-school programming, SRYI serves 50 children with educational and cultural enrichment camps each summer, led by Alvernia faculty and students.

Ethics, Leadership & Community Lecture Series

- Sponsored in partnership with the O'Pake Institute for Ethics, Leadership and Public Service, the Lecture Series will hold eight lectures in 2011-2012. Topics include the work of Pax Christi, Castro's Daughter, Justice Takes a Community (judges panel), *Strength in What Remains* (First-year Seminar), Interfaith Dialogue, Planning in Reverse (Business department faculty panel), Rabbit at Rest (Updike Scholar), and the annual Hesburgh Lecture.

Service-Learning

- Service-Learning is a pedagogy of community-informed scholarship, reflective thought, and civic responsibility that promotes intentional learning, provides experiential knowledge, and fulfills community-defined needs. Service-Learning is embedded in several courses throughout the curriculum, and involves intentional collaboration with community partners. The combination of service and academics is an effective teaching and community change tool which helps students grow through critical reflection, personal discovery, the development of skills for life and the workplace, and multi-disciplinary expertise.
- In the 2010-2011 academic year, Alvernia University offered 20 Service-Learning courses in seven disciplines, 10 each in the Fall and Spring Semesters.

Angelica Park – Revitalization Projects

- An initiative in collaboration with the City of Reading to revitalize Angelica Park, a reclaimed wetland preserve located close to Alvernia University's campus. HCCE served on the steering committee for this effort, and supported the graduate assistant who was charged with providing leadership to the group. This revitalization plan included the renovation of the dilapidated boathouse into an Environmental Education Center, available for use by the University for classroom space and for programming in conjunction with the Berks County Conservancy.

Community Service

- The Holleran Center was given responsibility for coordinating University-wide Days of Service as well as monitoring students' completion of the 40-hour Community Service requirement beginning in the fall semester of 2011. In the 2010-2011 academic year, 1,246 Alvernia students recorded a total of 20,623 hours of service. Of those, 3,241 hours were completed as part of one of the four University-wide Days of Service, in which 673 students participated. The four days of service are: New Student Orientation Day of Service, St. Francis Day of Service, Martin Luther King Day, and Earth Day.

Alvernia READS

- Alvernia READS is designed to promote childhood literacy as well as improve academic achievement in the youth of the City of Reading. This is accomplished by having Alvernia University students read books with local children, and by collecting books for those children to take home. This program served 226 of K-5 students by handing out 470 books in the fall semester of 2011. Alvernia READS works with the Greater Reading Cops N Kids Literacy Program, the Title 1 Reading School District, and other partners to focus on increasing proficiency in literacy and the overall academic achievement of students.

Part 4: Operational Goals and Objectives

In pursuit of its mission, the Holleran Center for Community Engagement has responsibility for management and growth of several initiatives of the university. In particular, the Holleran Center is accountable for the management and tracking of the Community Service requirement for undergraduate students, for promoting and supporting Service-Learning and Community-Based Research; for encouraging and facilitating participation in University-wide Days of Service, and the administration of the South Reading Youth Initiative.

In many ways, these initiatives comprise the “toolbox” by which the Holleran Center accomplishes its mission and strategic priorities. To that end, the Center’s staff and its partners throughout the University have articulated five goals with several objectives for each, designed to improve both the quality and scope of these initiatives.

In addition to these internally identified objectives, the Holleran Center is dedicated to learning from other how best to serve our students and our community. As such, we will continue to identify and, where appropriate, adopt best practices in Community Engagement as found not only in our peer and local institutions of Higher Education, but in the schools which excel in this work nationally.

Operational Goals:

1. Provide focus to the University in the ways it engages in the community and responds to community needs.
2. Enhance student engagement in the community through expanded Service-Learning course offerings and Community-Based Research opportunities across the curriculum and into the community.
3. Increase student, alumni, faculty and staff participation in community service activities.
4. Expand South Reading Youth Initiative Programming to serve more children.
5. Establish the Holleran Center as a regional and national leader in civic engagement and as a leading community resource to nonprofit partners.

Operational Objectives:

Goal 1. Provide focus to the University in the ways it engages in the community and responds to community needs.

1. Direct HCCE programming around Areas of Programmatic and Strategic Focus (see below). This would include identifying appropriate service sites for University-wide Days of Service, targeted community service opportunities, programming offered to SRYI participants, and the development of new HCCE programs.
2. Apply for and receive Carnegie Foundation classification for Community Engagement in 2015.
3. Apply for and receive placement on the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll annually.
4. Work with Faculty to identify Service-Learning and Community-Based Research opportunities around focus areas.
5. Work with first-year seminar staff and faculty to identify strategic issues around which to coordinate first-year seminar curriculum and service opportunities.
6. In cooperation with the President's Office and the O'Pake Institute, schedule speakers for the Ethics, Leadership & Community Lecture Series around focus areas.
7. Work with the Department of Alumni Relations to identify service opportunities with alumni that support identified engagement focus areas.

Goal 2. Enhance student engagement in the community through expanded Service-Learning course offerings and Community-Based Research opportunities across the curriculum and into the community.

1. Work with faculty to develop Service-Learning courses in every discipline.
2. Identify Service-Learning and Community-Based Research opportunities around strategic focus areas.
3. With the appropriate faculty groups to explore the revision of the Community Service requirement to include Service-Learning coursework.
4. Expand HCCE and South Reading Youth Initiative programming to allow for more Service-Learning interaction.
5. Facilitate regular communication with Community Partners specifically for identifying opportunities for Service-Learning and Community-Based Research.

- Goal 3. Increase student, alumni, faculty and staff participation in community service activities.**
1. Develop a “service transcript” available to students upon graduation that details their community engagement activities during their tenure at Alvernia that would accompany their academic transcript.
 2. Explore ways of scheduling service opportunities, specifically including University Days of Service in order to minimize conflict with class schedules and facilitate commuter, evening and graduate student participation.
 3. Work with the Department of Alumni Relations to develop Alumni participation in Days of Service.
 4. Explore the feasibility of an Academic Minor in Community or Public Service.
- Goal 4. Expand South Reading Youth Initiative Programming to serve more children.**
1. Work with Millmont Elementary School and Olivet Boys and Girls club to re-locate the South Reading Youth Initiative to a location in the Millmont Neighborhood.
 2. Identify financial means for staff expansion, as well as funding to continue the program after the expiration of the federal grant that currently funds SRYI.
 3. Identify meaningful ways to serve program graduates, with the goal of being available to provide college application and financial aid guidance to SRYI alumni when needed.
 4. Expand program offerings to provide a natural link between the South Reading Youth Initiative and the Reading Collegiate Scholars Program.
- Goal 5. Establish the Holleran Center as a regional and national leader in civic engagement and as a leading community resource to nonprofit partners.**
1. Sponsor a Pennsylvania Campus Compact regional event on campus bi-annually.
 2. Offer at least one lecture annually with regional or national appeal.
 3. Work with the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce to continue and expand nonprofit support offerings through the Nonprofit Round Table. Explore curricular or certificate offerings in connection with Leadership Berks, the MBA program and other Alvernia academic programs.
 4. Identify partnership opportunities with nonprofit organizations with the potential to create meaningful responses to the challenges of the community.
 5. Work with the Office of Career Development to identify students for internship opportunities as needed with local community organizations.

Part 5: HCCE Areas of Programmatic and Strategic Focus

In developing this strategic plan, the Holleran Center for Community Engagement (HCCE) identified four areas of strategic focus in order to maximize the center's impact on the community and to guide program development accordingly.

Focus areas were developed during a series of HCCE staff meetings, held bi-weekly throughout the Fall semester of 2011. Individual meetings with key stakeholders followed, after which a revised set of focus areas was distributed to Provost Council and presented at faculty meetings for input and reaction. What follows is the culmination of that effort.

Each of these focus areas were informed by a number of factors, including but not limited to: identified priority needs in the community; current areas of strength and interest for the University; current areas of opportunity for the University within the community; and historic Holleran Center initiatives. Focus areas are necessarily fluid over time, based on the factors above. While some will likely remain priority areas for many years, others may be replaced by emergent issues as made necessary by changes on campus or in the community.

Below each focus area appears a list of key partners. This list is intended to be neither exclusive nor exhaustive. Rather, it is an indicator of current and potential strategic partners which are evident at this time. This list will change and grow with our efforts in each area.

1. **Early Childhood Literacy**—reading to children aged 8 or younger (primarily), ensuring that the parents of young children have access to books, and exploring and understanding the impact of early childhood literacy on educational and vocational success in later life. *Key partners for this effort: Education Department, the Alvernia Montessori School, the United Way of Berks County, Berks County K-3 educators, and the Literacy Council of Berks County.*
2. **Environmental Awareness and Sustainability**— Develop an improved awareness for environmental and sustainability issues on campus, increase educational opportunities around issues of sustainability for Alvernia Students and local K-12 students, and examine the potential for an Environmental or Sustainability academic program at Alvernia. This will specifically involve a greater programmatic presence utilizing the Environmental Exploration Center at Angelica Creek Park. *Key Partners: Faculty with expertise in Environment and Sustainability, Alvernia Facilities and Operations, Education Department, Division of University Life, the Rodale Institute, the City of Reading, Berks County Conservancy, Permacultivate, Alvernia Mission Office, Berks County Department of Parks and Recreation, Nolde Forest and the National Park at Hopewell Furnace.*

3. **The relationship between Poverty and Education**—examining the effect of the problems of poverty on educational systems and on educational outcomes, and suggesting/implementing programmatic and systemic solutions to counter those problems. This work will include the examination of issues that often accompany poverty and their effect on education such as access to physical and mental health care, crime, substance abuse, community blight, and others. *Key Partners: Education Department, Olivet Boys and Girls Club, O’Pake Institute, Division of University Life, Office of Student Success, Nursing Department, Berks Coalition to End Homelessness, Opportunity House, Reading School District and Reading Recreation Commission.*

4. **Interfaith Dialogue**—fostering dialogue within and between different faith groups in the community with an aim towards cooperative ventures in response to community issues. *Key Partners: Theology Department, Reading Islamic Center, Common Heart, Office of Mission, Campus Ministry, Office of Multicultural Initiatives, Division of University Life, the Jewish Federation of Reading, Interfaith Youth Core and the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.*

Programmatic Objectives:

Focus Area 1. Early Childhood Literacy

1. Utilize the AmeriCorps VISTA program to coordinate the Alvernia READS program through Academic Year 2013-14.
2. Integrate Alvernia READS substantially into the Ready.Set.READ! Initiative of the United Way of Berks County, and provide leadership to that initiative.
3. Work with Education and English faculty to identify Service-Learning opportunities around literacy.
4. Work with the Provost’s Office and the Education Department to develop a Center for Early Childhood Education.
5. Provide leadership to community-wide initiatives targeting early childhood education and literacy.

Focus Area 2. Environmental Awareness and Sustainability

1. Work with faculty to support the newly-created Minor in Community and Environmental Sustainability.
2. Develop an Office of Sustainability on campus.
3. Create a demonstration garden project that connects issues of sustainable agriculture and sustainable food access in low-income areas. This project will

include organic gardening instruction and fresh produce for sale in the City of Reading to consumers who utilize federal benefits to purchase food.

4. Integrate environmental awareness and sustainability across the curriculum by developing Service-Learning courses, community-based research opportunities, and other academic initiatives.
5. Work with students, faculty, staff and the community to develop a residential property, near to Alvernia's main campus, into a demonstration house for sustainability. This may include technological upgrades to reduce energy consumption, environmentally-friendly landscaping, or similar improvements.
6. Become a community leader and resource for local organizations that are working toward increasing environmental awareness and sustainability practices.

Focus area 3. The Relationship between Poverty and Education

1. Bring a nationally renowned speaker on this issue to Alvernia and integrate their work into the first-year seminar and other curricular activities. (Kozol—scheduled October 2012)
2. Work with faculty to integrate curricular content about poverty by developing Service-Learning courses, community-based research opportunities, and other academic initiatives.
3. Identify service opportunities with appropriate community partners to expand students' understanding of poverty. This to include specific opportunities around New Student Orientation Day of Service in Fall of 2012.
4. Serve as a leader in the community on issues related to the causes and effects of poverty in and around Reading, PA, Alvernia's home and the City with the highest rate of poverty in the nation.
5. Establish a college-access program in connection with Olivet Boys and Girls Clubs that helps Reading High School students develop the skills and knowledge they will need to be admitted to an institution of Higher Education. This will be connected to the South Reading Youth Initiative, Alvernia READS, and new scholarship and support programs for students who matriculate to Alvernia from Reading high schools.

Focus Area 4. Interfaith Dialogue

1. Engage in local, regional and national projects around issues of Interfaith Dialogue. These activities will certainly include providing leadership to Common Heart, a local grass-roots movement; and other local groups with interest in participating in interfaith dialogue.

2. Support faculty-led interfaith activities through Service-Learning, community-based research and curriculum integration.
3. Sponsor a lecture annually on intercultural or interfaith topics.
4. Participate annually in the White House Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge.
5. Integrate intercultural and interfaith learning activities for students through service opportunities.
6. Sponsor an annual interfaith event in partnership with Campus Ministry and Common Heart.
7. Host Interfaith Youth Core on campus, and sponsor one or two students to participate in an IFYC-sponsored Leadership Institute annually.