

A Living Laboratory: Revitalizing General Education for a 21st Century College of Technology

U.S. Department of Education Title V Grant, 2010-2015

Project Rationale

The overarching goal of this Title V project is to improve rates of retention and graduation of Hispanic and low-income students and to prepare them to be productive fully realized citizens in a democratic society. Title V funding will enable City Tech, whose historic mission has been to educate students--the majority of whom are underrepresented in higher education and enter the college with widely disparate levels of secondary-level academic preparation and career aspirations--to lead the cutting-edge technological and professional workforce that New York City will need as a major engine of the U.S. economy. To meet this mission, the college has evolved several hallmark strengths: its experiential, hands-on approach to learning; its identity as a school of technology; and its faculty expertise in place-based education. We will use these strengths to address identified institutional weaknesses.

The project, entitled "A Living Laboratory: Revitalizing General Education Program for a 21st-Century College of Technology," is structured around four activities:

- (1) Redesign General Education to strengthen its connections to degree programs and implement a comprehensive cyclical model of faculty development to help faculty members incorporate High Impact practices¹ and competencies into their courses;
- (2) Create a state-of-the-art digital platform to support teaching and learning while also increasing student and faculty engagement in the intellectual and social fabric of the college community;
- (3) Institutionalize a culture of assessment that integrates comprehensive outcomes assessment into the General Education curriculum; and
- (4) Build an endowment in support of the research and education mission of the Center for the Study of the Brooklyn Waterfront, which will in turn support the redesign of General Education. These cohesive and interrelated activities will enable the College to revitalize General Education, and the digital platform created in Activity 2 will facilitate a cohesive interface among them.

Key Project Features

A Living Laboratory. City Tech offers a wide array of programs in the professions, health and human services, technology, and design, which share hands-on, inquiry-based, laboratory models of instruction through direct experience. This is a familiar model to our students. Adjacent to Brooklyn's historic and endangered industrial waterfront, City Tech is positioned advantageously to use its

¹ George D. Kuh, *High Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* (Washington DC: AAC&U, 2008).

environs as a living laboratory for General Education courses. A series of recent grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) have enabled faculty and students to develop expertise in the interdisciplinary study of our surrounding neighborhoods. The college has begun to institutionalize these efforts through the formation of a new Center for the Study of the Brooklyn Waterfront, whose three-fold mission is research, education, and public outreach. This Center will support research opportunities for students and faculty members interested in place-based learning.

General Education Competencies across the Curriculum. Responding to a May 2008 Middle States Reaccreditation Report finding that the General Education courses at the College were disconnected from professional and technical courses of study, the College has undertaken a comprehensive review of its entire curriculum. During the 2009-2010 academic year, faculty members have identified the knowledge, skills, and values essential to their departments and disciplines; mapped convergences and divergences across departments; and determined where, in both required General Education courses and in degree programs, students have been learning those key competencies. The College will use Title V funds to build on these efforts and to strengthen these already identified connections between General Education and the majors.

High-Impact Pedagogy. Our faculty will focus intensively on *High Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* (George D. Kuh, AAC&U, 2008) that have proven effective with Hispanic and low-income students and *Modeling Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Campus Practices That Work for Latino Students* (Excelencia in Education, 2008). Our external evaluator, Dr. Thomas Nelson Laird, is affiliated with the Institute of Postsecondary Education at Indiana University Bloomington, where Dr. George D. Kuh serves as Director, and has expertise in the evaluation of these practices and their impact on underrepresented students. The college anticipates that the reforms instituted through Title V project activities will enable the college to increase the retention and graduation of Hispanic and low-income students, who represent the majority of City Tech's enrollment.

A Commitment to Outcomes Assessment. City Tech pledges to institutionalize the comprehensive outcomes assessment framework developed with Title V funds and to sustain faculty development activities for full-time and adjunct faculty beyond the life of the grant.

These commitments will ensure that the transformational changes achieved with Title V funding are sustained for future generations of City Tech students, whose educational outcomes are critical not only to their personal success, but also to the health of civil society and the economic vitality of New York City.