

## “Green Efforts” Uses New Technologies to Focus GCC on Sustainability

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Using technology, the Green Efforts Committee communicates, learns, and educates in virtual space. Their focus on global climate change created a campus movement towards sustainability, produced two campus wide Teach-Ins, and brought GCC national recognition and a Top-50 award from the Focus the Nation national committee.

### INTRODUCTION

Focus the Nation is an educational initiative with the following rationale:

“In the next few years, we as a nation will make, or fail to make, critical decisions regarding global warming pollution and clean technology investments. These decisions will have far-reaching and irreversible impacts on the lives of today’s students and the lives of their children. At this moment in time, we owe our young people at least a day of focused discussion about global warming solutions for America.”

In response to this statement, “Green Efforts” at GCC held a three-day Focus the Nation Teach-In event, January 30 – February 1, 2008 followed up by a similar event, the “National Teach-In for Global Warming Solutions” February 4-5, 2009. Everything the “Green Efforts” committee planned for these two events was for the benefit of our students and the community. It was the usage of new and innovative technologies that allowed for such large events to be planned by such a diverse committee.

1. **TIMELINESS** The convergence of several small pockets of interest morphed into a large, inclusive group that came to be known as “Green Efforts”. On Friday, October 5, 2008, three GCC faculty members attended the Global Sustainability Dialogue day at Gateway Community College and heard about Focus the Nation (FtN), <http://www.focusthenation.org/>, a nationwide educational initiative scheduled for late January 2008, dedicated to educating students on critical decisions regarding climate change and clean technology investments. Independently, and at the same time, the GCC STEM club led a petition to assess the level of interest in recycling on campus, and the High Tech Center started “Operation Green”, to educate users on behavior changes to reduce paper use. Clearly, there was a deeply felt need campus-wide to address climate change issues and sustainability practices. Within a week “Green Efforts” was formed and began the monumental task of planning a three-day FtN event at GCC in 2008. Over the next month the “Green Efforts” committee grew to a diverse group of 30-plus members from across campus including faculty, administration, staff and students, with wildly conflicting schedules. The committee goal was initially to give GCC students three days of focused discussion about global warming solutions for America. Given the broad diversity of “Green Efforts” members, it soon became apparent that the committee needed to utilize the talent of its membership and function as more than just a single event committee. Its greater mission was to lead GCC’s effort to build a more sustainable campus and educate the larger community on how this could be achieved. Doing this required new thinking and innovative ways to communicate rapidly and effectively.

“Green Efforts” is a successful, if young, endeavor whose time has come. Both Teach-In events attracted large numbers of students to the many different sessions, and a faculty presentation (Climate Change 101) will be used as an education piece for MCCCCD’s trip reduction program. Publicity via email, the wiki and the web page was extremely effective at mobilizing students. To date, 50+ students have signed on with the new Environmental club, and the Community Roundtables elicited sincere praise from the participants and the audience. With innovative techniques, the preparation work for the Teach-Ins was done in 10 weeks whereas a traditional approach would have taken many months. Even in this short time, the approach has been well tested and has proven effective.

2. **COLLABORATION** “Green Efforts” is a model of inclusive collaboration both within its membership and the larger community. The committee represents all employee groups (Faculty, M&O, MAT, PSA, Administration) and students. With efficient use of new technologies, “Green Efforts” members communicate, learn, educate, work and share ideas in virtual space **using wikis, web pages, blogs, electronic calendars, and email distribution lists**. All meeting minutes and discussion threads are written directly to the **wiki**, <http://wiki.gc.maricopa.edu/display/green/Focus+the+Nation+Schedule> , with all members enjoying editing privileges. The wiki links to the “Green Efforts” **web page**, <http://www.gccaz.edu/greenefforts/> , which, in turn, links to the GCC main web page, <http://www.gc.maricopa.edu/> . The wiki is used as a resource for press releases, a source of information for the “Green Efforts” web page, a place for invited speakers to stay abreast of new developments and an information resource for faculty and students Maricopa-wide. Feedback is written directly to the wiki for all to read. As part of the build up to the Teach-In events, a daily email entitled Green Tips was emailed to all faculty, and recipients were encouraged to respond via the “Green Efforts” **blog**, or by direct response to the “Green Efforts” **email address**, [greenefforts@gcmail.maricopa.edu](mailto:greenefforts@gcmail.maricopa.edu). Using these new technologies facilitated constant communication and interaction within and between member groups.
3. **EFFICIENCY** The 2008 Teach-In event at GCC, which was recognized in *The New York Times*, was organized in less than three months due to innovative technology usage. Through the 2008 and 2009 Teach-Ins, “Green Efforts” has educated the campus about the ramifications of climate change and sustainability issues, re-invigorated the Environmental club, connected with different student groups, connected with the citizens of Glendale, and set up mechanisms for timely feedback from all constituents. None of this would have been possible without the extensive use of technology. At the core was an email distribution list created to keep all “Green Efforts” members connected. Given the short lead-time for the first Teach-In event, rapid information dissemination was vital. Email was also used extensively to promote the event with faculty. In addition, a blog was begun to allow faculty and students to provide feedback on daily email Green Tips. GCC, MCLI and District electronic calendars were used to promote the event across the GCC campus and Maricopa. Embedded links allowed access to the wiki where the latest information was stored. And, with extensive use of virtual space, paper use was reduced to a minimum.
4. **CREATIVITY** “Green Efforts” was named a “Top 50” Focus the Nation venue in 2008 by the umbrella organization, from among 1600+ universities and colleges across the nation. The award was based on the duration (3 days) of the GCC event, the depth of community involvement, the information shared on the web site linked to the wiki, and the creativity shown by the event. “Green Efforts” used the talent and diversity of the committee to develop the Teach-In event in an extremely short time and shared progress with committee members, invited speakers, and the GCC student body through the wiki. Through innovative communication, “Green Efforts” was able to adapt the goals of the Teach-Ins to the needs of the GCC student body. For example, each computer in the Student Union had a direct link to web sites allowing users to calculate their carbon footprint or calculate the consequences of a consumer-driven lifestyle
5. **LEARNING** Everything the “Green Efforts” committee planned for the Teach-In events was for the benefit of students and the community. Educators owe students information on what is probably the greatest crisis of their generation. The Maricopa values of “Learning, Community and Stewardship” were fully realized during both the 2008 and 2009 Teach-In events as hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and community members and businesses participated. During the first Teach-In event on

Wednesday evening, January 30, 2008 “Green Efforts” entertained almost 200 people at the first annual kick-off event that included appetizers and a screening of the “Age of Warming.” The following morning state leaders and scientific experts came to GCC for an informative morning session of talks, which saw crowds of up to 170 people. On Thursday evening a Community Roundtable discussion ensued with an audience of over 60 people. On Friday morning, February 1, GCC faculty presentations were also well attended with a peak attendance of 140 in the audience. In addition, many individual faculty members incorporated the message of sustainability into their own coursework. One of the highlights of the event was the many green vendors who came to visit the campus to talk with students. The GCC mall was turned into an interactive educational center for two days. Students were given hands-on experiences with innovative technology such as a car fueled by hydrogen and the chance to discuss alternate energy with local businesses such as APS and American Solar. Moreover, students attended wildlife exhibits on campus to remind them of what will be lost if climate change is ignored. The 2009 Teach-In event was organized, planned, and followed a similar schedule with great success as seen by the similarly high attendance numbers.

6. **QUALITY** A number of Maricopa values were promoted by the Teach-In events. Diversity and community involvement are the principle and most evident values in everything that was done. Diversity can be seen in the composition of the “Green Efforts” Committee itself. Members of the committee crossed departmental lines, came from all employee groups, and included students. Follow-up activities maintain this emphasis on diversity and inclusivity. Community involvement arose naturally due to concern about the issue of climate change. The surrounding community was brought in to contribute expertise and aid in forming ties to help members of the campus reach out and work with the wider population. The work that was begun during the 2008 event set in motion activities that continued promoting sustainability up to the 2009 event and beyond. The committee itself still functions with its broad base while welcoming new members who bring new ideas and perspectives. The GCC Environmental Club has been reinstated as a direct result of the enthusiasm that the events generated, and students are becoming aware of what they can do within the community to effect change. This club is working with members of the “Green Efforts” committee so that it can become a seamless expression of concern for the campus, the Maricopa community, and the total environment. Indeed, the initial efforts of a few individuals have led to an inclusive, powerful and tightly connected community with a vision for the present that will lead to a sustainable future.
7. **REPLICATION** Similar Teach-Ins have already been replicated at over 1600 institutions across the USA. The committee structure, collaboration and swift action facilitated by technology at GCC could be readily duplicated at other MCCCDC colleges by recognizing the importance of collaboration of all campus groups. Following the schedule on the wiki, which includes the committee meeting minutes, could act as a planning blueprint, and the MCLI could act as a facilitator through the well-established Sustainability Dialogue. The fact that “Green Efforts” already replicated their Teach-In again in 2009 demonstrates this.
8. **COST EFFECTIVENESS** The “Green Efforts” committee’s commitment to and promotion of sustainability certainly adds value to the campus as sustainable/green practices save money, time, materials, and energy. GCC now recycles which saves materials. New buildings are being built more energy efficient. New efforts on campus are aimed at reducing HVAC costs. The past fourteen months have seen a huge growth in energy saving ideas at GCC as students, faculty, employees and administrators alike join in “green efforts” on the GCC campus.

## “Green Efforts” Committee Members 2007-2009 (Years of service varies)

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### **GCC Student Clubs**

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