

“Green Efforts” Uses New Technologies to Redefine *Committee*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Green Efforts” redefines *committee*. Using technology, members of “Green Efforts” communicate, learn, and educate in virtual space. Their focus on global climate change created a campus climate change by tapping into commitment to sustainability 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.”

<http://www.focusthenation.org/about.php>

In response to this statement, “Green Efforts” at GCC held a three-day Focus the Nation event, January 30 – February 1. Everything the “Green Efforts” committee planned for the event was for the benefit of students and the community.

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 C 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 at the same time, the GCC STEM club led a petition to assess the level of interest in recycling on campus, and the 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. 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 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 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. The FtN event attracted large numbers of students to each of the twelve sessions over three days, and a faculty presentation (Climate Change 101) will be used as an education piece for MCCC’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 reinstated Environmental club, and the Community Roundtable elicited sincere praise from the participants and the audience. With innovative techniques, this was done in 10 weeks whereas a traditional approach would have taken many months and missed the deadline. 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 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 “G

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 FtN event, a daily email entitled Green Tips was emailed to all faculty, and recipients were encouraged to respond to the “Green Efforts” **blog**, <http://greenefforts.blogspot.com/>, or by direct response to the “Green Efforts” **email address** greenefforts@gmail.maricopa.edu. Using these new technologies facilitated constant communication and interaction within and between member groups.

- 3. EFFICIENCY** The three-day FtN event at GCC, which was recognized in *The New York Times*, was accomplished in less than three months. In doing this, “Green Efforts” has promoted the ramifications of climate change and sustainability issues across the GCC campus, re-invigorated the Environmental club, connected with different student groups, connected with the citizens of Glendale, and set up mechanisms for timely feedback from 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 FtN event, rapid information dissemination was vital. Email was also used extensively to promote the FtN event with faculty. In addition, a blog was begun to allow faculty and students to provide feedback on daily email Green Tips. GCC, MC 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, travel use was reduced to a minimum.
- 4. CREATIVITY** “Green Efforts” was named a “Top 50” FtN venue by the FtN umbrella organization, from among 1600+ universities and colleges across the nation. The award was based on the number of days (3) of the FtN event, the depth of community involvement, the information shared on the web site linked to the wiki, and the creativity shown by the GCC FtN event. “Green Efforts” used the talent and diversity of the committee to build the FtN event in a short time and share progress with committee members, with invited speakers, and with the GCC student body. Through innovative communication, “Green Efforts” was able to adapt the goals of FtN 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 FtN event 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 FtN as hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and community members and businesses participated in the three-day event. On Wednesday evening, January 30, “Green Efforts” entertained almost 200 people at the kick-off event that included appetizers and a screening of the “Age of Warming.” On Thursday morning, January 31, state leaders and 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, Feb 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 FtN into their own coursework. One of the highlights of the event was the 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 Science. Moreover, students attended wildlife exhibits on campus to remind them of what will be lost if climate change is ignored.
- 6. QUALITY** A number of Maricopa values were promoted by the three-day FtN event. 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 work with the wider population. The work that was begun during the event set in motion activities that were designed to continue promoting sustainability. 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 event 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 The FtN event has 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 MCCC 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.