

CCGA Pushes for Increased Service-Learning Opportunities

By LAUREN MCDONALD lmcdonald@goldenisles.news

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Following a national trend in higher education, College of Coastal Georgia has significantly expanded its service-learning opportunities for students.

This semester, CCGA faculty are teaching a record-breaking 29 service-learning courses.

"By having an increasing number of students enrolled in courses with a service-learning component, we have more students becoming engaged in the community who are gaining hands-on experience while meeting community needs," said Kimberly Kinsey Mannahan, director of service-learning and undergraduate research at CCGA.

Since 2011, CCGA has made it a priority to enhance its academic experience through the promotion of service-learning, a teaching method that ties community service and volunteerism to material being taught in the classroom.

"Right now it's really coming into stride," said Cody Cocchi, associate director of service-learning at CCGA. "A lot of our professors are trained to teach service-learning courses, just because it's a little bit different than your traditional teaching for a normal class."

Cocchi said service-learning is meant to provide students with real-world examples of what they study in class.

"There's a lot of educational theory out there that says that you learn more by doing and talking about what you're doing, as opposed to just talking about theoretical things in the classroom," he said. "The experience is the key to that academic enhancement."

Service-learning also provides students with a civic identity, Cocchi said, by encouraging them to consider ways they can use the unique skills learned in college to give back to their community.

Coastal has designated several service-learning faculty fellows to help lead the expansion of service-learning opportunities.



College of Coastal Georgia teaching candidates took Needwood Middle School students on a field trip to the local cemetery.
Lauren McDonald/The Brunswick News

Lydia Watkins, a professor of nursing at the college, serves as a faculty fellow, which she said involved working with her fellow faculty members as they begin to incorporate service-learning into their teaching.

This semester, Watkins is teaching a pediatrics class. She said her nursing students go out in the community and teach in the local school system about healthy practices, such as dental hygiene, stress management and clean eating.

One purpose of service-learning, she said, is to help students find their passions.

"Our goal is to graduate someone for whom nursing isn't just their career or program, but it's part of who they are," Watkins said. "We like to show them how they can use their nursing skills to give back to the community."

As more higher education institutions across the country begin to push service-learning as an academic enhancer, CCGA plans to continue growing its own service-learning opportunities, Cocchi said.

"It is a trend in higher education," he said. "It started as general volunteerism and community service and kind of built from that, so now it's looking more academically at how we can use these opportunities of community service and volunteerism to enhance our students' abilities and skills."