

May 19th, 2010

Jerry R. Herman, Ed.D.
Director
Corporation for National and community Service
Tennessee State Office
233 Cumberland Bend Drive, Suite 112
Nashville, TN 37228

Dear Jerry:

The question of whether a state campus compact provides sufficient services to dues-paying member institutions has no doubt arisen countless times in the 24 year history of this effort. Since Tennessee is new to this arrangement, the question is fresh for us; and particularly important to address during these early years. I will attempt in this letter to offer my perspective on a possible answer to the question, by providing my vantage point/history with the effort; my philosophical musings on the question along with related practical considerations; some tangible, noteworthy results from our new Tennessee Campus Compact, and finally, a metaphor I believe to be apt; to suggest how such a venture should work.

Mani Hull approached me in either late 2006 -early 2007, to see if I could serve as a contact inside the UT system to aid her efforts to get a Tennessee Campus Compact (TNCC) chartered. I agreed to help and she persisted in her work until the charter was signed in Nashville on March 13, 2008; as part of the opening day of the Gulf South Summit. I was in attendance, as was Dr. Jerald Ogg, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Tennessee-Martin, where I teach.

Since the signing of the charter, I have tried to maintain an active role in the life of TNCC. This past Summer, we, at UTM; hosted a system-wide videoconference to discuss civic engagement and service learning at the respective UT-System campuses, including UTK, UTC (not currently a member of TNCC) and the UT Health Sciences Institute. As the UT system representative to Volunteer Tennessee, I try to serve as a bridge between TNCC (with an emphasis on higher education) and Volunteer Tennessee (focused largely on service learning and civic engagement K-12). Mani is also part of each of these organizations, so this allows us to collaborate often and meaningfully.

As for my promised philosophical-to-practical thoughts, consider this: no organization can possibly be more effective than its members. State compacts have been in existence for decades and some of them are no doubt highly effective and useful to their member campuses and others are probably not doing such a good job. Each of these compacts are an assemblage of independent universities which, to varying extents; work together. The state coordinating offices of campus compact are the best way to help assure dues-paying members benefit from the national organization. Without this state affiliation, each campus would not be as likely to consider itself an important member of the national compact.

So, how is TNCC doing thus far? The TNCC website, hosted by UTM at www.utm.edu/tncc offers a premium version of the site to TNCC members with information on grant funding, training manuals and other useful materials. The general website is full of useful links and knowledge, as well.

TNCC has made VISTA AmeriCorps members available to numerous campuses and will continue to do so to those campuses active in TNCC. Also, UTM was the beneficiary of service-learning workshops provided by Clark Maddux from Austin Peay State, contracted through TNCC and I have seen other examples of resource sharing around the state; coordinated by TNCC.

Each year TNCC will hold a conference designed to celebrate civic-engagement accomplishments, provide time for members to plan collaboration and inspire greater civic engagement at member institutions. The conference has been at UTM and in Nashville previously, and this year will be held September 16 and 17 on the UT-Knoxville campus.

Suffice it to say, I believe in TNCC and the benefits it provides campuses, mainly at this point, due to the tireless efforts of the office in Nashville. However, as we go forward, the success will depend greatly on member participation; for in the end, it is this cooperation that makes a great state organization.


I will close with this analogy. Imagine you are a rent-paying member of an arts and crafts co-op and the members hire a manager to run the store where their works are displayed. The co-op member who places little or none of her work in the store is in essence, wasting her "rent money"

TNCC is not best seen as an agency contracted to provide services to dues-paying members, rather; it is better understood as a co-op where each campus makes both monetary and participation "payments". Rules require the monetary "payments", but only norms can maintain the participation "payments". It will be up to each of the compact members to encourage a norm of high participation among campuses for this venture to succeed. The store manager, in this case the TNCC Nashville office; is in the paradoxical position of trying to make a co-op effective, while many of its members choose to pay only the monetary dues.

Any campus paying the TNCC dues has two forms of diligence to perform: (1) to inquire as to how the store is being managed, and (2) to make sure they are sending enough items from their campus into the store, to keep it viable.

I believe the future of TNCC is bright, not only because of the relentless efforts of Mani Hull and her staff; but also because of the effective leadership on the campuses involved. Together, we will make TNCC a proud member of the national compact.

Cordially,



P. Michael McCullough, Ph.D.
Professor of Management
Director UTM Institute for Civic Engagement
210 College of Business and Global Affairs
email: mccullou@utm.edu
731.881.7325