

Fitchburg State University
Strategic Planning White Paper
Community Working Group
November 15, 2014

This Working Group of the SPC is charged with addressing the challenges and opportunities of Fitchburg State University's responsibility to develop and nurture a mutually supportive and beneficial connection with its immediate community, Fitchburg, Mass, and its extended metropolitan region.

Concepts for discussion:

1. Identify/Define "community"
2. Relationship between University and Residential Community
 - a. FSU current perception of relationship with community
 - i. Any major shifts in character/quality of relationships between FSU and community
 - b. Strong relationships/successes to leverage for future
 - i. Inventory of successes
 - ii. FSU personnel involved in successes
 - iii. Public relations
 - iv. Types of programs (mutually beneficial programs/shared services, academic lecture series, special access for locals, etc.)
 - c. Failures/trouble spots/tensions
 - i. Housing
 - ii. Parking
 - iii. Relationships with FSU neighbors
 - iv. Formal economic impact analyses?
3. Relationship Between FSU and Business Community
 - a. Connections to local businesses
 - i. Part-time student employment
 - ii. Internships for students
 - iii. Foster relationships with FSU personnel and local merchants
4. Relationships between FSU and Public Sector
 - a. Political connections
 - i. Mayors
 - ii. City councils
 - b. Police Departments/Fire Departments/Courts/Health Care Industry
 - i. Mutual training
 - ii. Disaster reaction plans

Members include: Nick Capasso, Executive Director of the Fitchburg Art Museum; Robert Carr, Faculty, Communication Media; Christopher Hendry, Vice President for Institutional Advancement; Daniel LaFond (Student Representative), Renee Scapparone, faculty, Business Administration; Joshua Spero, faculty, Economics, History and Political Science; Elizabeth Walsh –Chair, faculty, Criminal Justice. Regular contributors also included Marc Dohan, Executive Director of the Twin Cities CDC, Jannette McMenemy, Interim Assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and Jessica Augat, Director of Special Projects, External Affairs.

Key Issues/Questions:

1. What is the relationship between the university and the residential community?
2. What is the relationship between the university and the business/nonprofit community?
3. What is the relationship between the university and the public sector?
4. How do we define community?
5. Does our definition of community vary depending upon the objective?
6. How do we capitalize on current mutually beneficial community partnerships and explore untapped community resources?
7. How do we integrate the University within the community (is there a potential, if not a preference for a “College Town” model)?
8. How is/ can the community be welcomed in to the University?

Process: We first met on May 30th and have met every other week (eleven times) since. The Community Working Group’s discussions over this nearly 5-month period were wide-ranging. We addressed such topics as how we define community; if and how well we, as a university, are aware of all of the community-related projects in which our faculty, staff, and students are currently engaged; our engagement with the community must be mutually beneficial; and how we determine what the community expects and/or wants from the university. Over the course of our meetings, we invited as our guests, representatives from the university and the community to inform our mission, including Marc Dohan, Executive Director of Twin Cities CDC, Mike Kushmerek, Ward 4 Fitchburg City Councilor, and Jay Bry, Vice-President of Finance and Administration.

I. Increase Service Learning and Internships Opportunities for the entire campus

High impact practices like service learning and internship opportunities have proven to be both impactful to current students, supportive of the local and regional economy and tremendous recruiting tools. The Community Working Group is recommending a focus on these practices and suggests the following to begin the conversation:

- a. Centralize internship opportunities through a single office
- b. Assess internship needs/wants in local community
 - i. Identify logical non-profit, civic, corporate and political partners to continually place interns in Fitchburg (short term goal)
 - ii. Identify regional partners to expand programming (mid-term goal)
 - iii. Build a sustainable program that will increase Fitchburg State’s brand as an internship/service learning university (long term goal)
- c. Engage alumni with the program to expand its depth nationally

II. Engagement of local community

The university is inextricably linked to the City of Fitchburg. The university needs to embrace this and help lead the re-emergence of the City. Recommendations include but are not limited to the following:

- a. Define “local.”
 - i. The community can mean many different things for each of these recommendations.
 - ii. Local is not limited to Fitchburg proper, but needs to start within the immediate confines similar to the Clark Model presented by Jay Bry.
 - iii. The long-term goal is to expand the notion of local from Fitchburg, to the region to the Commonwealth and beyond.
- b. Assess current activities within the community where the university is already engaged
 - i. Determine the efficacy of current programs
 - ii. Identify potential gaps/needs
 - iii. Identify current and potential partners
 - iv. Align programming with the Strategic Plan for potential university support
- c. Set measurable goals for “meaningful, long-term” mutually beneficial engagement
 - i. The university needs help in determining what the community expects and wants in their relationship with the university.
 - ii. Goals must have clear positive outcomes primarily driven by and from the community
 - iii. Develop a strategy to welcome the community into the University
 1. Facility usage
 2. Programming and cultural events
 - iv. Long-term goal is to create a sustainable model where the community feels tied to the university and embraces their role as a partner
- d. Highlight small projects that can be implemented quickly to begin building stronger foundation in/with the community. The short-term, mid-term and long-range goals will be determined based on a, b, and c above.
- e. Engage in dialog with untapped communities with the university (e.g. Latino population, veterans etc.).

III. Economic Development

The viability of the university is inextricable linked to the economic health, well-being and development of the City. To address this, we might consider the following:

- a. Initiate feasibility study to assess where the university can partner with the City. Potential projects might include:
 - i. The creation of an entrepreneurial center
 - ii. Sponsored Day-care opportunities
 - iii. Promote the City’s designation as a Cultural and Arts District

- iv. Establish Fitchburg as a small, vibrant College Town
- b. Consideration of a modified “Clark University” model, a collaboration Clark University has with the Worcester South Main CDC
 - i. Help raise intellectual capital and investment capital
 - 1. The “F” in Fitchburg is the same as the “F” in Fitchburg State University
 - 2. Identify and assist marketing effort for branding both Fitchburg and Fitchburg State
 - ii. This initiative would be a long-term commitment from the university, understanding a need for slow, steady growth. This may include:
 - 1. Creating housing for faculty, students and staff as a community, as residents
 - 2. Improving links to the university with the Fitchburg K-12 population (short-term) and additional school districts (long-term)
 - 3. Encourage current residents to join the process in creating a safe, livable and vibrant community
 - 4. University incentives to assist local home owners to improve their properties
 - 5. Identify partners for this collaboration (City of Fitchburg, Chamber of Commerce, Fitchburg Art Museum, Twin Cities CDC and local financial institutions etc.)