



CDB-SL-VISTA-022408

**AMERICORPS VISTA** — CSCC Graduate Peter Lawson was recently hired as the AmeriCorps VISTA to assist Cleveland State in developing a service-learning program on its campus. From left are Dr. Carl Hite, CSCC president; Dr. Jerry Faulkner, vice president for Academic Affairs; Susan Webb-Curtis, associate professor/director of Cooperative Education; and Peter Lawson, AmeriCorps VISTA.

Another step in the right direction for Cleveland State in 2008 was the hiring of Cleveland State graduate Peter Lawson as the AmeriCorps VISTA to assist Cleveland State in designing a service-learning program, developing community partnerships, and involving CSCC faculty and students in this new initiative.

Service-learning offers a unique opportunity for students to get involved and make a real difference in their communities by integrating community service projects with classroom learning. It engages students in the educational process, using what they learn in the classroom to solve real-life problems. Students not only learn about democracy and citizenship, they become actively contributing citizens and community members through the service they perform.

Some of Lawson's responsibilities as the AmeriCorps VISTA include working with college personnel to raise awareness of the importance of higher education and civic engagement, encouraging faculty and student involvement in service-learning experiences, recruiting community partners, assisting in preparing volunteers for service activities, and working to establish a sustainable service-learning program. He will assist CSCC in

developing an organizational infrastructure for service-learning at the main campus, as well as the two off-campus sites.

Lawson stated, "The older I get, the more I look at the young people of today, and it seems as if they are less involved in politics and civic engagement. I feel the more you know what is going on in your community and the more involved you become, the better.

Dr. Jerry Faulkner, vice president of academic affairs, said, "Service-learning takes students beyond the four walls of the classroom. It provides an opportunity to learn that exceeds anything found in textbooks, lectures, or the Internet. The real world, experiential opportunity afforded by service-learning impresses potential employers because it shows that students can succeed beyond academia."

Cleveland State has really taken an active approach to service-learning. In July of 2008, CSCC hosted a Tennessee Academic Civic Engagement Program Conference. The conference, conducted by administrators from Vanderbilt University, was the regional training for community colleges from east Tennessee to learn how to implement service-learning programs on their campuses. In addition to the faculty

from CSCC, representatives from Walters State, Chattanooga State and Roane State Community Colleges were also in attendance at the conference.

Susan Webb-Curtis, associate professor/director of Cooperative Education, said, "So many colleges mention civic engagement and the importance of developing good citizens in their mission statements; service-learning is a natural progression of that effort. We are seeing more elementary, middle and high schools implementing community service activities into the learning experience of students. Colleges are seeking to continue that initiative by incorporating service-learning activities into existing courses. This experiential learning is invaluable for the student and assists the community at the same time."

Cleveland State President Carl Hite said, "It is so important for us to prepare our students to be 'excellent learners,' but is also extremely important to prepare these students to compete in

today's workforce by becoming 'active learners.' Service-learning enables us to do that. It is a perfect example of how we get students out in the community getting to know people. It really helps students not just in terms of applying their skills of what they've learned in the classroom setting, but also their needs. I feel that our performance funding score only proves that is what we are doing at CSCC."

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