FALL 2015

CLASP Newsletter

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INSIDE THE ISSUE

• CLASP celebrates 25th anniversary
• My time with CLASP
• 2015 Adult learner educational requests
• Spring 2015: Main interests of employee learners
• Learning partner spotlight
• Bob Hutko’s farewell
• Meet Christine Johnson- UAW Zone representative, Statler Hotel

Recognizing the upcoming 25th anniversary of the Community Learning + Service Partnership program as a good moment for reflection, nearly three dozen people gathered in early summer for a THINK-IN. The two-hour discussion focused on taking stock of CLASP, now two and a half decades since its founding in 1990.

Participants represented local UAW leadership as well as staff, students, employees, faculty, and administrators from multiple departments, units, and centers. Extending upon a presentation of the history, goals, and activities of CLASP, participants engaged in wide-ranging discussions of the current contexts, strengths, and challenges facing the program.

Pivotal questions were identified. Practical ideas for solutions were generated. This process ultimately led to a decision to pursue the development of a “case statement” that will frame CLASP’s goals, its value to the university and learners, the key opportunities and challenges it faces, and possible approaches to ensure the program’s relevance and viability. Participants were asked to engage in further consultation to assist in developing the proposal as well as in generating additional avenues for connecting and strengthening CLASP.

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Key questions discussed included:

- How have student and employee circumstances changed since the inception of CLASP in 1990?
- In what ways might the program need to adapt to new realities? What should remain constant?
- Why have the numbers of students taking the affiliated EDUC courses been in decline over time?
- Would CLASP be strengthened if it had a clear departmental affiliation?
- Who/what are the most beneficial partnerships for the program to develop?

At the close of the deliberations, we summarized three of several outcomes of the event. Those gathered were particularly pleased to have:

1. Began articulating CLASP’s relevance and importance within the context of Cornell’s commitments to students for engaged learning and international experiences, to the workforce for professional development opportunities, and to local residents for strengthening communities;

2. Built awareness and cross-knowledge to begin seeing potential, mutually-beneficial ways of working among collaborators with CLASP; and

3. Worked together as a great group of stakeholders and Friends-of-CLASP in setting the program up for success in contemporary contexts. Since this Think-In event, two subsequent stakeholder meetings have continued the discussions.

TOGETHER, WE ARE CLASP!
Spring 2015: What were the main interests of employee learners?

The spring 2015 semester was a busy one for CLASP! In total, there were 30 employee learners who participated in the program. They worked in areas such as career readiness, citizenship examination preparation, food test preparation, computer skills, high school equivalency test preparation, adult basic education, and English as a second language skills.

Overall, the largest and most diverse area of interest was in developing computer proficiency; employee learners made progress in a range of skills from general computer orientation to specific Microsoft Office applications. The second most commonly requested learning service was in ESL training. Employees reinforced their understanding of English grammar, learned new vocabulary words, increased conversation skills, and developed techniques for continuing their education beyond the program.

It is not rare among many students who go to Cornell to find people who inspire them and push them to do more.

Working with Khin Khin, a building care employee at Cornell, during the spring semester helped me develop a new, different well-spring of courage that I truly needed, with no exaggeration. Throughout the semester I worked with Khin Khin on developing his English skills, especially his reading ability. I pushed him hard and made sure he worked at it until it felt right; the same way my Japanese teachers at Cornell pushed me. At the time I started working with Khin Khin, I was contemplating the job application process and seriously considering dropping my studies in Japanese. Instead, after seeing how hard Khin worked to learn English, I decided I too must continue studying Japanese. I even decided to try for a job in which the main language was not my native tongue.

Khin Khin works every day in English and pushes himself to improve. I feel as though I realized the poise it takes to pursue my goal from his example. CLASP as an organization colored my last year at Cornell more than any other organization. When I felt as though my peers and professors didn’t have the answers, I found them in helping the Cornell employees and having them help me.

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Bob’s farewell message to CLASP

Hello Everyone,

I hope you have all had a great summer and that you are excited to get involved again with learning through CLASP! Many of you know that I have been slowly losing my vision, and I’m sad to say that I will not be returning because of it and other health reasons. I have enjoyed spending the last 11 years working with many of you on many different subjects and in many different settings. Working with you has shaped me as a person, and I feel grateful and honored that I have been able to spend my days developing deep friendships and helping you achieve your goals.

I wish you all the very best and hope that you will keep in touch!

Bob Hutko (rjh9@cornell.edu, 607-339-5192)

‘Learning Partnership Spotlight’... Continued from Page 3

“Learning partner’s perspective”

Khin Khin worked with Max during the spring semester on reading and English pronunciation. When asked about their learning partnership, Khin Khin said that he felt Max, who was learning Japanese, understood how hard it was to learn a language and that Max “would always make me try until I understood.” For example, Khin Khin noted that Max encouraged him to read slowly and not skip words he did not understand. Khin Khin said he saw an improvement in his reading ability after working with Max for the semester. Learning to read is important to Khin Khin so that he can read books to his children in English. When asked about the CLASP Program, Khin Khin noted that it is a “good opportunity to learn a new skill” and that it would otherwise be “hard to go to (BOCES) class after work” to learn ESL. Khin Khin hopes to continue working with CLASP on his English language skills in the fall.

Friends of CLASP

Christine started working part-time at Cornell at the Statler as a room attendant. She became more active in the union in 2012 during contract negotiations. Christine is currently co-editor of the UAW Local 2300 newspaper “The Bear Facts” which just won three Excellence in Communication Awards from LUCA (Local Union Communication Association). Christine notes that her involvement in UAW activities here on campus make her feel empowered. “I am helping myself and my co-workers.” As a union representative, Christine educates workers about services such as CLASP. When asked about the benefits of CLASP to Cornell employees, Christine noted, “It can help in so many ways that can’t even be measured. It opens employees up to the Cornell community a little more, and sometimes learning something new can be a domino effect; who knows where it will take them. It can absolutely be life changing.”

Christine was asked what she hopes to see for CLASP in the future. Christine noted that she would like to see “more visibility and greater accessibility of CLASP.” Christine emphasized that, if not for the support of the supervisors, participation in CLASP would not be possible for employees. CLASP would like to thank Christine for her all of her support including her participation in our recent planning events.

We welcome your feedback!

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