



## Promoting global peace through community colleges

By PAUL McVEIGH AND DAVID SMITH

Community colleges today represent some of the most culturally and ethnically diverse learning environments in the world. In the U.S., the metaphor of the melting pot is being replaced by the notion of a mosaic of diversity: each piece of the mosaic standing on its own representing a specific identity.

This identity, however, is often in flux. Diaspora groups, often from regions that are emerging from periods of violent conflict and unrest, travel frequently to their homelands sharing news, transmitting culture and conveying impressions of America abroad, all the while finding their place in our national montage. The challenges brought on by this diversity, not surprisingly, can often be felt in community colleges.

An ever-present question is: how do diaspora groups relate to their former homeland? Identity is thought of as a critical factor in conflict. If so, how are community colleges treating issues of cultural, ethnic and religious difference in the classroom, in curriculum, in extra-curricular activities, in recruitment and in a host of other situations? Are there approaches that community colleges can take to promote better understanding, awareness and peaceful coexistence between groups who are pronouncedly different in religious practices, language, appearance and worldview? Finally, can these efforts in community colleges help promote peace in their former homelands?

In seeking to address these questions, Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) partnered with the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) to host a two-day seminar last month entitled "Identity and Global Conflict: Implications for the 21st Century." The objective was to provide an opportunity for faculty and staff to learn about approaches to teaching about global conflict with a focus on diasporas.

NVCC is a large urban and suburban institution in metropolitan Washington, D.C.—the largest provider of higher education in Virginia—with six campuses and 63,000 students annually. It is a remarkably diverse college with 188 nations and territories represented. Established in 1984, USIP is congressionally fund "think, do, teach and train" tank with a mission of preventing and managing violent conflict and working in post-conflict societies to promote peace-building.

The institute accomplishes this through a variety of strategies including grant-making, research, publishing, training and education. It works in U.S. and international secondary and higher education environments in promoting learning as a means to advancing global peace. In particular, the institute has recognized the important role that community colleges play in American society.

Presentations at the seminar centered both on traditional classroom pedagogy as well as on more institution-wide efforts. Faculty from the Minneapolis Community and Technical College discussed their partnership with Puntland State University in Somalia, brought about because of the huge Somali population in their state. Presenters addressed teaching Arab-American Muslim students and using technology in teaching about identity. Other topics included understanding African diaspora groups and looking at ways in which Latin American immigrants are supporting education efforts in their native homelands. Curricular models for teaching about peace were also considered.

An important feature of the seminar was running a simulation for NVCC students looking at identity and conflict among Israelis and Palestinians.

Terrence Lyons, co-director of the Center for Global Studies and a faculty member of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University (Virginia), delivered the keynote address on the first day of the seminar, speaking on the role that

diasporas play in conflict and peace in the U.S. and in their homelands. On the second day, Anastase Shyaka, NVCC's Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence and director of the Center for Conflict Management at the National University of Rwanda, described the status of Rwanda's recovery from genocide.

As community colleges such as NVCC continue to meet the needs of their increasingly changing constituencies, partners such as USIP are prepared to help in improving the educational environment. Community colleges should seek out organizations, often unaware of the great opportunities in these institutions, to aid them in preparing Americans for the new global society.

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Participants at last month's seminar discuss teaching about global conflict with a focus on diasporas.

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