

**LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE PROJECT REPORT  
2007-2008 Academic Year**

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**CCP VetConnect  
An Online Community for Veterans at Community College of  
Philadelphia**

**OVERVIEW:**

We created CCP VetConnect to provide an online community for the CCP Veterans. Through the Groups' function of Community College of Philadelphia's Banner service, we hope to tighten the community of Veterans at the college, bringing them together for academic, economic, social, logistic and psychological purposes. We have populated CCP VetConnect with students who have identified themselves as veterans when they registered for courses, and we have developed for this community a central online location where they can connect with other vets at the college. In addition, we have provided in this one space access to the military news sources, as well as links to Veterans Administration benefits' materials and opportunities.

This project seeks to create a cohesive community of veteran students who can look to one another and to one site for support and service. Our short term goal is to establish a safe environment for isolated students at CCP to find connections with other students who are here under similar circumstances. Our long term goal is to create a peer to peer online community for all students at the college, building the groups incrementally and by areas of interest.

**“FOSTERING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PERSISTENCE”:**

We know that many students drop out of school or lose focus in school because of isolation and a lack of support from within their own communities; we anticipate that creating small, responsive, supportive communities within the college will help us retain students, giving them access to a broader community of other students with whom to they can

persist in their academic goals and become more engaged with their academic peers in their college experience.

### **RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN:**

Our research began when Brian Seymour suggested we seek department heads willing to participate in and support college-wide online student community, but we realized that we really wanted our project to be a student driven resource. We met with John Pinto about a joint online venture with the tutors in the lab. John was hesitant to help us until he saw evidence of other administrators' commitment. He suggested we speak with Dave Watters.

We telephoned Dave who warned us that we needed to take this in small steps, as we were working with an organization that was technologically about 20 years behind the times. Then we did what any business person would do and went to a computer wizard, Arnold DiBlase, who assured us that what we had in mind was very much within the realm of possibility; in fact, he told us that his son, a student at Drexel, uses its Banner Group function to establish online communities with students at other schools. We were in a quandary. We knew the project was possible within the present computer configuration of Community College, but we also knew that there were roadblocks, traditions and approaches that would make it difficult to accomplish our goals.

Instead of spreading out the project to many departments, requiring commitments and engagement from each department, we narrowed the scope of the project to a given community – the vets.

We met with Steve Woodson, Coordinator Archiving and Research. His enthusiasm was palpable, particularly as he was in the process of establishing a new facility for the vets, a place where they could meet, use the Internet and relax. He had gotten some money for this project and felt our online community fit perfectly with his goals; he asked that we attend a meeting with him so that we could introduce our service to a large group of Veterans' administrators from other colleges. His pilot program is going really well, and he has been able to double the funding for 2008 academic year.

We then met with a small group of vets to preview the site. They gave suggestions about information necessary to include in the site and

asked questions that helped us shape the site to respond to their needs. We researched the appropriate publications and resources vets require and often have difficulty obtaining and put many of them on the site's homepage.

Finally, we did a copyright search to assure ourselves that we could legitimately use the name of our service – VetConnect – but found a dating service for veterinarians had already claimed the name. After fiddling with our options, we came up with a name that nobody else claimed – CCP VetConnect.

### **STEPS TO COMPLETION:**

We first spent several afternoon brainstorming sessions, coming up with the “vision” we hoped to create. This step helped us identify our long term goal and define the scope of our online community so that when we had to refine our “vision,” we could readily apply our plan to a smaller online community.

We presented our proposed project to our mentor, Dr. Sharon Thompson, and to the Leadership Institute at an open session for other administrators at the college. After that session, Jody Bauer and SK Calkins of IT urged us to meet with them before we went ahead with our project. We met with them and Dr. Thompson, and they expressed concern that CCP did not have the resources to handle a higher demand for computer space. We assured them that we were using resources already in place – Groups function on Banner – and that we would clear the group of users at the end of every semester. We also told them that we planned to monitor the site's use and would post the college's usage policies.

Our group began to meet every Monday to hone and shape the site and to prepare a survey for our user group to help us determine how to shape our online site to best suit the group's needs. We are currently planning a preview party for which we have been given money to provide food in a formal and festive environment where we can roll out the service and respond to questions and requests to our end users. We have sent an invitation to a luncheon on April 25, and we are waiting for responses.

### **LONGER TERM GOALS:**

We hope to finalize our online community over the summer and present a formal introduction of it during Professional Development Week at the beginning of the fall term once we have our vets on-board and ready to

use the service. At that point we will explore creating other interest groups for similar online communities.

### **INSTITUTIONALIZING CCP VETCONNECT:**

We are sure that with the support of faculty and administration across the college, the benefits of our focused project will prove to be so worthwhile that we can anticipate more small online community groups beginning to develop over the next year. Then, we can finally institutionalize a college-wide peer to peer student driven online community.

### **ASSESSMENT PLANS:**

We will continue to assess the usage and the response to CCP VetConnect over the next academic year, tweaking it and refining it until we are confident that this model can be used for a college-wide system. In addition, we will monitor its use, assuring the college that the usage complies with usage policies.

### **INDIVIDUAL EVALUATIONS:**

#### **Sarwee:**

The project taught me about teamwork. For a long time in my career, I always thought I had to know and do everything. As a leader, I learn to recognize the skills and expertise of the team members, and accept and allow those team members who are experts in their fields shine as we go through the different phases of the project.

While I am about to "graduate" from the LI, I must admit that I am still not a good presenter. I am very shy, but will do my part if I have something to say.

#### **Faith:**

Working on CCP VetConnect I learned that each of us was able to make meaningful contributions once we made space for our talents, giving each of us an opportunity to invest in the project at a level that was comfortable and appropriate. I learned as well that even when invested in a group project, I am able for the sake of the project to put aside my ego. I also learned that I cannot always predict outcomes, no matter how fastidiously we plan for them. Finally, I have learned to identify what to get upset over and what to let go. As in anything, balance is crucial. Bhavesh taught me that a negative response is simply an opportunity to look in

another direction, and Sarwee showed me that quiet people have a great deal to offer!

The sad part of working on this project is learning the extent of the creative energy that is wandering the halls of CCP, energy that is too often bottled and thwarted. With a real vision, CCP could really do some magic in this city; we certainly have the resources, the imagination and the capacity.

**Bhavesh –**

This project gave me the opportunity to take on a initiative that did not seem to be very popular. Every step along the way, we were told "it's a great project" but when asked to participate in the management aspect of our project, the response was not quite what I expected. Even though this was discouraging, I felt it would be easy to overcome. We went on to setup the CCPVetConnect group, and began to monitor the interaction. To date, users are logging in, but they are not using it for its purpose. For me this provided an opportunity to engage them to get feedback as to what they want CCPVetConnect to be and how should it look. In then end, CCPVetConenct will be a product that the Vets will find useful and it will lay the foundation for a larger group intended for the general student population.