

# **The Workforce Educator Academy at Union County College**

## **Encore Careers Project Final Report**

**Prepared for Civic Ventures  
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### **BACKGROUND**

In 2009, Union County College's Division of Economic Development and Continuing Education was awarded an Encore Careers grant from Civic Ventures and the MetLife Foundation. This grant was part of a national Encore Careers initiative managed by Civic Ventures for eight community colleges in the United States.

UCC agreed to pilot a "Workforce Educator Academy" designed to help "50-plus" career changers to prepare for paid employment in adult basic education, workforce development, and related fields such as citizenship test preparation, occupational training, and prisoner re-entry. This project thus merged several interests of our non-credit division: (1) building the capacities of local adult education and related programs and (2) helping various worker populations move into rewarding careers.

Summarized below are:

- Goals;
- Activities;
- Accomplishments and lessons learned;
- Budget;
- Next steps: How we might continue this work in the future.

### **GOALS**

This project was to:

- Provide training and other services to enable selected 50-plus adults to move into new careers in adult basic education, workforce development, and related fields such as citizenship test preparation, occupational training, and prisoner re-entry.
- Develop a model of such a professional development program that could be adapted by others nationally.

## ACTIVITIES

### **Initial program planning: Late 2009 – Spring 2010**

In this project, UCC had originally hoped to partner with several adult education and prisoner re-entry programs which would provide learning opportunities and potential jobs for participants in a proposed training program for 50-plus'ers interested in moving into adult basic education, workforce development, and related fields such as citizenship test preparation, occupational training, and prisoner re-entry. When the proposed partners were severely impacted by funding cuts, UCC needed to quickly find new partners and to revise our original plans. UCC was itself likewise impacted by funding cuts and other pressures resulting from a deflated economy, job market, and cuts in public funding. By spring, we were able to right ourselves and launch the series of activities described below with some of the original partners and with additional new ones.

The project was led by Paul Jurmo, Ed.D., Dean of Economic Development and Continuing Education at Union County College. As WEA Coordinator, he designed the program, led many of the course sessions, created partnerships with a number of local and state agencies, guided guest speakers on the content of the sessions, and recruited and selected students. He was aided by the following UCC staff members and representatives of other agencies:

- UCC administrative staff Madeline Velez, Joe Oliver, Eileen Mallor, and Denise Petrosky who helped with student recruitment and project operations.
- UCC Lead Job Developer Michael Glassett who helped with project planning, publicity, and career advisement for participants.
- The guest speakers who shared their expertise on various special topics in adult education:
  - Jessica Tomkins (Literacy Volunteers of New Jersey): “Financial Literacy”
  - Dr. Bruce Roach (Prisoner Re-Entry Specialist): “How to Serve Ex-Offenders”
  - Shirley Hollie-Davis (Assistant Dean at UCC’s Center for Economic and Workforce Development): “Adult Basic Education and Job Development Programs”
  - Michael Glassett (UCC Lead Job Developer): “Career Preparation for Adult Learners”
  - Aileen Vega, Amy Dixon, and Aydalid Valencia (UCC Occupational Trainers): “ESL for Healthcare Workers,” “Financial Literacy,” and “ESL Navigations.”
  - Steve Kilduff (Literacy Volunteers of Union County): “Citizenship Test Preparation”
  - Carol Bouer (National College Transition Network): “Integrating Career Awareness into the ABE, ESOL, and College Transition Classroom.”
- The programs that opened their doors and provided internship experiences for WEA participants:
  - Literacy Volunteers of Union County,
  - UCC’s Retail Skills Center,
  - Union County One Stop,

- Jefferson Park Ministries,
- Community Learner Partnership Center.

### **Recruitment and selection of project participants**

- **Publicity**: UCC used two existing marketing tools: press releases (issued by the UCC marketing department) and a weekly on-line employment bulletin board issued by our own non-credit division. (See Appendix A for a sample announcement.)
- **Information Sessions**: UCC organized four two-hour Information Sessions for people interested in applying for the WEA. The content of the sessions was adapted from similar orientation sessions that it uses for other UCC occupational training programs. In each session, participants (a) listened to a PowerPoint presentation by the WEA Coordinator (which outlined the WEA goals, content, schedule, and requirements), (b) discussed questions related to the PowerPoint, and (c) if they wanted to apply for the WEA, filled out an application and handed it along with a resume. (They also showed a photo identification to prove that they were over 50 years old.) Sixty people attended those four sessions, two of which were held on Saturday afternoons and two on a weekday evening over a two week period in late March and early April.
- **Selection of participants**: The WEA Coordinator reviewed the 60 applications to narrow down the potential pool to a list of approximately 20 finalists (later whittled to 15 when several applicants were not able to commit to the full program). Selection criteria included:
  - **evidence of expertise that would be useful in adult basic education, workforce development, and related fields**: For example, some participants had done volunteer work in schools or in their religious congregations. Several had finance-related skills that could be adapted to the teaching of financial literacy. One had experience as a media specialist. One had run a national program which helped schools use newspapers as educational tools. Three of the participants were lawyers, who could potentially provide legal advice to low skilled or unemployed adults. One had held administrative positions in Latino media companies.
  - **ability to commit to doing the work required by the program**: Participants were asked to indicate that they understood the work required and would be able to complete this work.
  - **diversity of gender and ethnicity**.
- **Notification of applicants**: All applicants were notified by e-mail whether they were selected for the program.

### **Curriculum planning**

The WEA Coordinator decided to provide several types of learning experiences for the participants which would help them develop (a) basic expertise about adult basic education, workforce development, and related fields and (b) personal connections to potential employers in those fields. Drawing on several other professional development programs that he had run or participated in and on his understanding of and connections with local adult education providers;

he created a curriculum consisting of the learning activities and career planning activities described below.

He mixed classroom discussions, readings (from carefully selected web sites), on-site observations and hands-on experience in actual adult education classrooms, special focused workshops, exposure to many types of organizations and practitioners, reflection in written logs and a final paper, and other learning opportunities. The idea was to help participants develop knowledge, connections, and confidence they might need when seeking a job in these fields.

### **Learning activities**

- Four initial three-hour workshops run by the WEA Coordinator (with a few guest speakers from local agencies). (These sessions were held at UCC's new campus building in the City of Elizabeth on two Saturday afternoons and two weekday evenings in April. The schedule was determined with the input of participants.) In these sessions, participants learned about:
  - the make-up of the local adult education and workforce development fields,
  - approaches/methods of adult basic education, and
  - jobs available in these fields.
- A project web site ([www.weacademy.net](http://www.weacademy.net)) which provided WEA participants with:
  - links to relevant web-based resources for adult educators,
  - a “blog” forum to share their experiences, and
  - an example of how to use simple electronic technologies (e.g., a class web site and blog and free web sites on selected topics) as an educational tool.
- A minimum of eight hours of “Internship” visits in which participants visited local adult basic education programs, observed what happened in those programs, and recorded observations on a “Site Visit Log” which the WEA Coordinator reviewed and gave written feedback on. (See Appendix B.)
- Four additional special 3-or-4-hour workshops on topics such as financial literacy, citizenship test preparation, working with ex-offenders, using educational technologies, and career services for adults.
- More intensive training by several organizations:
  - a day-long workshop on the “Integrating Career Awareness into the ABE, ESOL, and College Transition Classroom” curriculum by the National College Transition Network (on April 29, 2010);
  - the day-long annual conference of Literacy Volunteers of New Jersey (on April 24, 2010);
  - a day-long NY City adult education conference (on May 1, 2010);
  - a 15-hour tutor training by Literacy Volunteers of Union County (in three days in May and June, 2010)
- Creation by participants of a portfolio containing a summary of activities carried out and lessons learned by the participants, a resume, sample work done in the WEA, certificates from the above intensive training programs, and other evidence of participants' expertise. These portfolios were to be used not just as a course requirement but as a set of documents to present when seeking a job in the adult education and workforce development fields.

- A final 3-hour wrap-up session in June, in which participants discussed what they had learned in the course and possible next steps (to getting more training and/or to seeking a job) and completed a course evaluation.

This curriculum took several weeks to create, as the WEA Coordinator tried to respond to interests cited by the participants, availability of guest speakers, and new learning opportunities (e.g., conferences) that emerged during the early weeks of the Academy. This in turn required both the Coordinator and participants to be flexible and open to revision of the original plan.

Copies of the lesson plans, handouts, and other relevant documents for many of the above activities are available from the WEA Coordinator.

### **Career planning**

On May 8<sup>th</sup>, UCC Lead Job Developer Michael Glassett ran a three-hour workshop on career planning for adult learners and for adult educators. In this session, he gave participants tips on where and how they might find jobs in adult education and workforce development. He subsequently gave individualized counseling via email and phone calls to some WEA participants, to help them connect to employment in local adult education programs.

### **Dissemination of model**

The WEA model of professional development for adult educators is now being disseminated via:

- The project web site: [www.weacademy.net](http://www.weacademy.net);
- Postings on national listserves for adult education professional developers;
- Postings on listserves for adult educators in New Jersey;
- (possibly) future adult education conferences inside and outside New Jersey.

The WEA Coordinator is also talking with leadership of the Union County Workforce Investment Board, who are interested in supporting a new professional development activities for adult educators and workforce development specialists in the County. The WEA might become a core of that new professional development system.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

### **Number of participants served**

Of sixty applicants, 15 were selected for participation in the program.

Of those 15, all but three completed all program requirements and received a certificate of completion. (One person dropped out for personal reasons. Two others completed

almost all of the course requirements; one of them was delayed in completing the program due to a death in the family in the final weeks of the program; at this writing, she is working on completing the last requirements.)

A small number of other “50-plus’ers” participated in some of the WEA program activities (e.g., special workshops, day-long trainings) without formally being enrolled in the Academy.

### **Job placements to date in the adult education and workforce development fields**

Of the 12 who completed all course requirements, in the month immediately after the end of the program:

- All have received follow-up updates about job opportunities in adult education, workforce development, and related fields;
- 8 are known to have applied for jobs in the field;
- 5 of those 8 have already secured jobs in the field;
- 3 of those 8 are awaiting a response about applications they have submitted.

### **Impact on participant skills, knowledge, and self-efficacy**

Of the fourteen participants who completed all (or nearly all) of the course requirements, all reported positive impact on their:

- understanding of career options in adult education, workforce development, and related fields;
- understanding of special issues that they had a particular interest in (e.g., how to help learners develop financial literacy or pass the U.S. citizenship test, the special needs of ex-offenders, effective instructional practices for adults);
- self-efficacy (i.e., their sense that they have something positive to offer to the populations and programs focused on in the WEA).

### **Building a model of professional development for adult education and workforce development providers**

Adult basic education and workforce development providers typically have limited opportunities to build their expertise, get exposed to research-based practices, and feel that they are part of a community of professionals. The WEA allowed UCC to develop an innovative model of professional development with these features:

- use of a variety of learning resources: WEA took advantage of several conferences, workshops, and local resource persons and wove them into the “curriculum.” By so doing, we were able to greatly expand the range of topics that WEA could cover and provide many opportunities that participants could choose from (depending on their interests and availability). This also allowed the participants to get exposed to many organizations and resource persons they could

- use after WEA was over. (For example, participants are now aware of several annual conferences they can attend and a number of potential employers they might pursue.) In some ways, the fact that we were able to tap into these resources was “pure luck” in that we just happened to run the WEA at a time when the other events (e.g., conferences) were also going on. It was also good that the WEA coordinator and WEA participants were flexible and open to taking advantage of these resources that came into our view.
- collaborative learning: The WEA participants and coordinator ended up spending a lot of time together, both at the class sessions run by the coordinator, in the other “Special Workshops” run by guest speakers, and at the other longer events (e.g., annual conference of the Literacy Volunteers of New Jersey) that they attended together. A friendly camaraderie developed fairly quickly. This made coming to class, sharing contacts and other information, and encouraging each other easier. Activities within the WEA classes were also generally organized as group discussions rather than “lectures.” Participants were encouraged to contribute their own answers/perspectives on discussion questions and to ask questions of the guest speakers.
  - lack of traditional “academic” pressure: The WEA participants were there voluntarily and at no monetary cost to them. They enrolled because the topic was of interest of them. There was no significant competition or worry about “grades.” (Participants knew that, if they did the work, they would pass the course and earn a certificate.) In short, the participants were motivated by pride, curiosity, and a desire to improve themselves and prepare themselves to be able to take on a new, socially-positive role in a new field.
  - allowing learners to customize the learning to their particular needs/interests: Beyond being required to participate in a half-dozen class sessions run by the WEA Coordinator, participants were given a lot of leeway in what activities they would participate in and the local programs they would visit. This allowed and encouraged participants to customize the program to their own interests and schedule.
  - intensity of learning: WEA participants were given many learning opportunities to choose from in a short time period. They thus had to be focused and organized. They were also asked to write Site Visit Logs and do other written work between classes. They were to compile these writings in a portfolio to be handed in at the end of the course. The classes taught by the WEA Coordinator covered big topics in a short, focused way. All of these activities meant that the participants were caught up in a fairly intense series of learning experiences. Participants could see that they were learning a lot in a short time.
  - well-qualified, carefully-chosen guest speakers: The WEA Coordinator was careful to choose people with proven track records to serve as guest speakers. These resource people were assumed to have a good grounding in the topics they presented on and support the perspective (of contextualized work-related services to help people advance in their careers and education) promoted by UCC.
  - connection to actual employment in the field: As part of the WEA experience, participants got exposed to job opportunities and potential employers in adult education, workforce development, and related fields. They emerged from the

course with a portfolio that they could show to employers. Within one month, five of the participants had secured jobs in adult basic education programs, a field that is in the best of economic times hard to find employment in.

### **Building a network of trainers**

WEA provided opportunities for UCC to pull together a cadre of well-informed, dynamic instructors who had expertise in a number of aspects of adult education and workforce development (e.g., financial literacy, citizenship test preparation, serving ex-offenders, etc.) The WEA Coordinator observed these trainers in action as they provided special workshops to the WEA participants. This allowed UCC to establish relationships with a number of trainers who UCC hopes will become part of a county-level professional development team.

### **Building a network of adult education and workforce development providers willing to hire WEA graduates and other well-equipped adult education professionals**

By sending participants out into the field to visit programs, WEA created a de facto network of service providers who were open to hiring the program graduates.

### **Support for new kinds of adult education programs**

We used some of the WEA funds to create adult education demonstration programs (e.g., an everyday English “ESL Navigations” course which became popular with Haitian refugees, a “Financial Literacy” course) in which the WEA participants could serve as interns. We scheduled some of these pilot classes on Saturday mornings, immediately preceding the WEA classes. WEA participants could thus spend the day on our campus, serving as interns in the “ESL Navigations” and “Financial Literacy” classes (where they observed the experienced instructors and, in some cases, helped out with class activities) and then stay on to attend the WEA class in the afternoon. This arrangement not only gave a convenient and rewarding learning opportunity to the WEA participant but allowed UCC to field test some new curricula and to also serve local adult learners.

### **Increased interest among policy makers**

Leadership of the Union County Workforce Investment Board is now interested in providing professional development activities to local adult education and workforce development providers. WEA is being looked at as a model that might be adapted by the County, to help improve the quality of services in the County.

*Overall, after a frustrating delay to the start of the program, it took off in a big way and was very successful in providing a robust professional development experience to the WEA participants and in building a model of professional development that could be adapted for others interested in working in these fields.*



## **BUDGET**

The \$25,000 project grant was invested primarily in paying a variety of individuals and organizations which provided professional development opportunities to WEA program graduates

## **NEXT STEPS**

Based on the very positive results of the WEA, UCC will:

- Consider how UCC might employ some of the graduates of the WEA. UCC's non-credit Division of Economic Development and Continuing Education employs many people in instructional and administrative positions for its adult education and workforce development programs. We will give fair consideration to WEA graduates who apply for positions. We will also continue to advertise the WEA and its graduates to other organizations with whom we interact in the county and region.
- Consider providing another version of the WEA in spring 2011 for community members interested in moving into careers in adult education and workforce development. We would schedule next year's WEA to overlap with other relevant conferences which happen in the spring. As we did this year, we would include those conferences as potential components of the WEA.
- Consider hosting a community forum on adult education in fall 2010. WEA graduates would be invited to attend, to learn from the speakers and to interact with representatives of local programs.
- Disseminate this project report widely within Union County, New Jersey, and elsewhere, to influence how professional development is provided for adult education and workforce education service providers and to generate resources for similar training programs in the future. UCC's non-credit division leadership plays active roles on many adult education and workforce development bodies at the county, regional, state, and national levels. We will use the project web site, listserves, meetings, conferences, and other means to advertise the WEA model. This is especially important in Union County and New Jersey, where there are few in-depth training opportunities for adult education and workforce development practitioners.
- Investigate how to create other kinds of "Encore Career" programs. UCC will consider how we might create Encore Career programs which help over-50 career-changers move into other types of social service work.
- Follow up with the pilot students during the coming year to determine how the program impacted them over time.

*For more information, please contact Dr. Paul Jurmo (Dean, Economic Development and Continuing Education, Union County College, 40 West Jersey Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202, [Jurmo@ucc.edu](mailto:Jurmo@ucc.edu), 908-659-5103).*

## APPENDIX A

### Sample WEA Announcement (distributed electronically and in local newspapers)

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#### A Rewarding New Career Path for Older Workers

*March 7, 2010*

We Want You if you are “50+” (50 years old or older) and are interested in exploring new career opportunities in the adult basic education and workforce development fields.

Union County College’s Division of Economic Development and Continuing Education is launching a “Workforce Educator Academy” to help older “career changers” move into volunteer and possibly paid positions (in instructor, administrator, and other roles) in programs which:

- provide educational services in basic literacy, GED test preparation, English as a Second Language, citizenship test preparation, basic computer skills, financial literacy, health literacy, and occupational skills.
- serve a number of adult and out-of-school youth populations, including people lacking a high school diploma, immigrants, unemployed people trying to transition to a new career, people who want to become U.S. citizens, and returning inmates.

Academy participants will (a) participate in a 12-hour course in April and May which introduces them to the fields of adult basic education and workforce development, (b) engage in an unpaid internship in one or more adult basic education or workforce development programs in Union County, and (c) be introduced to employment and educational opportunities in these fields.

To learn more about this new program, come to a 90-minute information session on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of UCC’s new Kellogg Building at 40 West Jersey Street in Elizabeth on March 10 (6:30 pm), March 13 (2:00 pm), March 17 (6:30 pm), or March 20 (2:00 pm). Bring a valid photo ID and resume. You will learn about the program and fill out an application. This program will be provided at no charge to participants, but applicants must show that they are willing and able to participate fully.

To register for one of the information sessions and to get more details about this program, email [Velez@ucc.edu](mailto:Velez@ucc.edu).

This project is funded by the MetLife Foundation through Civic Ventures. Read more about other examples of “Encore Career” projects at <http://www.encore.org/> and <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/04/business/04JOBS.html>.

**A P P E N D I X B**

**Site Visit Log  
(completed by WEA participants  
when they visited a local adult education program)**

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*Workforce Educator Academy*

**INTERNSHIP SITE VISIT LOG**

**Your name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date and time of visit** \_\_\_\_\_

**Site visited** \_\_\_\_\_

**What you hoped to accomplish in this visit:**

**What you actually did:**

**What you observed:**

**Useful lessons you learned from this visit:**