

**Proposal to The Office Of Sustainable Development and Intergovernmental Affairs**

**National Oceanic And Atmospheric Administration**

**U.S. Department Of Commerce**

**The Center For Sustainable Communities And Civic Engagement:  
The Think Tank Design**

**Submitted by**

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## **I. THE PROJECT**

Daemen College requests funding from the Office of Sustainable Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs to help support the development of the think tank in its new Center for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement. The request is for \$24,500, commencing March 1, 2001 and concluding February 28, 2002.

### **A. Background: The Establishment of the Center for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement and the Faculty-Student Think Tank for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement**

While the concept of sustainable communities has been gaining in vitality and viability over the last twenty years, its link to civic society and civic engagement has been much less clear. Much of the dialogue now taking place underscores the need to nurture in citizens the understanding that civic engagement may be the lynchpin of any community's ability to sustain its cultural and environmental treasures while also providing for sustained economic growth. The establishment of the College's Center for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement, through support from NOAA and anticipated support from the local Oishei Foundation (\$600,000), will be the first entity in the country to focus undergraduate education on the linkages between sustainability and civic responsibility.

The mission of the Center is to strengthen Daemen College's commitment to graduating students familiar with the issues surrounding sustainable development, the cultivation of liveable communities, and the twin tasks of preserving the cultural and historical legacies that define communities while providing for economic development that does not compromise the well being of subsequent generations. The Center, in order to fulfil its mission, will provide the education that will enable students to understand that a community's well-being and sustainability are related to levels of civic participation. The Center will also engage students in activities directly benefiting a community and its sustainability. This practical component will entail the establishment of long-term collaborations with private, public, and non-profit organizations dedicated to improving existing communities and ensuring their vitality over time.

The activities of the Center are three fold. First, the Center will provide a focal point for the development of collaborative curricular projects that educate students about civic responsibility and its link to the development and maintenance of sustainable communities. The curricular piece will initially focus on the development of a major in Sustainable Communities and Historical and Cultural Preservation. This approach will place Daemen College in the forefront of undergraduate education in Western New York by preparing its graduates for an unfolding and enduring discussion that addresses the question: what is the relationship between economic development, environmental well being, especially as related to the region's waterways and lakes, and the need to keep and restore major historical and cultural artifacts and legacies, ranging from indigenous lands, the Erie Canal, to the Peace Bridge? In Western New York the interplay between sustainable community development and civic engagement is intense, making it an ideal location for the development of the Center. The curriculum piece will be designed to prepare students to understand the concept of a sustainable community and to be engaged in the development and definition of the interplay between sustainability and civic engagement. The curriculum will require a substantial research project, done collaboratively between students and a sponsoring faculty member. The research will be applied, with strong policy implications. Each research project will take place during the student's senior year, although many will be initiated during the second semester of their junior year. Students must take an interdisciplinary approach, while also demonstrating an ability to bring to bear a key methodology (biology, history, statistics, economics, sociology, chemistry, etc.) as a centerpiece of the analysis. A limited number of projects will receive funding support from the Center and will be considered for publication in the Center's on-line Occasional Papers Series.

In part the research will be folded into the second part of the Center's activities: the development and operation of collaborative community projects designed to address serious problems impeding the development of sustainable communities. The Center will focus on one issue on a long-term basis and will also develop yearly projects that may stem from the collaborative research done by student and faculty teams. General areas that will be addressed include: (1) the state of land and water toxicity in select communities; (2) the resilience of native cultures and their significance to definitions of sustainable communities; (3) the effect of international trade between Canada and Mexico on Western New York's vitality as a sustainable community; (4) the facilitation of civic participation on vital issues affect the

sustainability of the Buffalo-Niagara area; (5) policy recommendations to various organizations and/or state agencies on such issues as the pollution of waterways, lack of civic engagement in poor communities, and the state of and remedy for health issues in select underrepresented communities; and (6) the education of K-12 students by Daemen College students on civic engagement and the improvement of their communities. These projects will engage faculty and students from a variety of disciplines and provide an often-missing link in undergraduate education: the connection between a liberal arts curriculum, applied learning and research, civic engagement, and the development of sustainable communities.

The third activity is the development and operation of the Faculty-Student Think - Tank for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement (FSTT). The think tank will be the heart of the Center by providing a public forum for research into issues and policies affecting the nexus between civic engagement and sustainable communities. The FSTT will have three functions: (1) to promote knowledge about the concepts of and issues surrounding sustainable communities and civic engagement among colleges and universities in the United States and eventually internationally; (2) to develop and sponsor research projects on sustainability and popular participation in decision making; (3) and to disseminate the findings of the sponsored-research projects. The College is seeking support from NOAA for the design and development of the think tank and for the first research project.

#### **B. The NOAA-Sponsored Component: The Faculty-Student Think Tank for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement**

Daemen College requests support from NOAA for \$24,500 for the development of its Faculty-Student Think Tank for Civic Engagement and Sustainable Communities (FSTT). The think tank will serve as the primary research arm of the Center for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement and will be centered on the principle that students concerned with sustainable issues need to engage in applied research tied directly to policy decisions. The FSTT will also serve as the primary vehicle by which students and faculty collaborate on a significant research project related to civic responsibility and sustainable communities and through which students test the application of interdisciplinary and specialized research.

At the heart of the FSTT is the web site and the Occasional Paper Series. The Web site will serve as an information hub for the College's Center for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement (CSCCE). The site will provide information about the Center, its activities, and the results of its sponsored research projects.

The Occasional Paper Series (OPS) will publish the results of suitable and efficacious joint faculty-student research projects. The projects will be student generated and must deal with an important local, national, or global issue affecting sustainability. Particular emphasis will be placed on issues that also involve the investigation of the relationship between community sustainability and levels of civic engagement and ones that seek to increase the capacity for sustainability through policy recommendations. Each project must be interdisciplinary and optimally contain cognitive and affective dimensions. They need to also involve some qualitative and quantitative analysis.

The FSTT will have a board of directors comprised of practitioners, faculty, and students and the head of the think tank initially will report to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, assuring continued administrative support. One of the responsibilities of the Board will be to procure extramural support for the evolution of the think tank and for the research projects selected for support. The OPS will have a Board of Editors who will review and select projects that ultimately will be published as part of the series. While the intent is to publish at least one paper each year, publication schedules will be determined by the Editorial Board and will be based on the quality of the projects' findings. Most papers will be presented on line, with an occasional one of exceptional distinction presented in printed form.

Specifically, NOAA support will be used for the following objectives:

- The design of the entry page to the web site;
- The design of the architecture of the web site;
- The design of the content of the web site;
- Launching the new web site (fees, etc.);
- Faculty development about the most pressing issues affecting the development of local sustainable communities, with special emphasis on water issues and issues of cultural and historical preservation affecting a sense of community; and

- The formation of the Board of Directors and the Editorial Board;
- The development of the guidelines for the award of project support monies;
- The development of the guidelines for submission of project findings for the OPS and the criteria for selection; and
- The development and implementation of an inaugural research project conducted by a joint student- faculty research team.

The development of the Think Tank and the Occasional Paper Series will also be evaluated as part of the project. The results of that evaluation will be part of the final report submitted to NOAA at the end of the funding period in March 2001.

NOAA support is also part of a larger funding application to the Oishei Foundation, Buffalo, New York and to the Baird Foundation, also of Buffalo. The funding will be used to establish the other aspects of the Center for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement, including specific projects in historically underrepresented African American, Hispanic, and Native American communities. There will be the development of a specific curriculum and major on Sustainable Communities and Historic and Cultural Preservation, as well as the development of international partnerships in areas of civic society and sustainability in Canada and Mexico. Daemen College believes that NOAA's continued support after the initial project would be valuable and significant.