Coalition for Refugee Resettlement: Pilot Street Project
Adult Literacy Programming

Mission Statement
The central mission of the Center for Student Engagement & Community Partnerships (hereafter CSECP) is to coordinate and strengthen partnerships between the university and the community, enhance service-learning opportunities and experiential learning activities, and develop faculty and partner capacity for community-university engagement.

Principal Services
CSECP is comprised of five major program areas:

- **Service-Learning** integrates community service into course or competency-based credit-bearing educational experiences. CSECP manages approximately 73 courses from 25 academic departments for 3,047 students annually. In addition to coordinating service-learning experiences, CSECP operates three “Signature Service-Learning Programs” in the areas of refugee resettlement, foodsheds, and global citizenship.

- **Student Engagement** comprises a series of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that are educationally purposeful and civically oriented. These activities include a Social Entrepreneurs Student Grant Program, Alternative Breaks, student capacity building, and a service-themed residence hall.

- **VT Engage**, established in response to the Virginia Tech shootings, encourages everyone to do volunteer work as a way to give back to the community and reinvigorate the university motto of Ut Prosim—That I May Serve. VT Engage organizes a Daycare Facelift as part of its Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, maintains a Virtual Volunteer Fair, supports alumnae volunteerism, and facilitates the creation of Remembrance Projects to commemorate those who lost their lives on April 16th.

- **Engaged Departments** is a faculty development initiative that promotes a paradigm of scholarship that is built on collaboration rather than individual achievement.

- **Scholarship of Engagement** is a variety of practices and relationships whereby university and community representatives work together to address issues of common concern through participatory research, deliberation, collaboration, and community partnerships.

Project Purpose and Outcome

Specific Geographic Area to be served:

Roanoke, Virginia is located midway between New York, NY and Atlanta, GA on Interstate 81, 168 miles west of the state capital, Richmond, VA. The city is the center of one of Virginia’s largest metropolitan regions, and a hub of transportation, finance, and industry for the southwestern part of the state. In 1980, Roanoke became one of three resettlement cities in the state of Virginia. The Office of
Refugee and Immigration Services, reporting to the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, has resettled over 4,000 political refugees who have been approved by the U.S. Department of State to come to this country since then. Roanoke was chosen as a resettlement city due to its low crime rate and moderate cost of living.

What is the literacy rate in the area served?

Based on the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy, the percentage of persons 16 years and older lacking basic literacy skills in 2003 was 14%, thereby establishing a literacy rate of 86%. The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey found that 25% of the adults in the City of Roanoke were functionally illiterate. The Literacy Volunteers of Roanoke assumes that these statistics have not changed drastically since the data was collected. Among the particular populations served by the Project, the adult literacy rate for the Somali Bantu and Burundian populations is determined by cultural experts to be between 20-24 per cent. These figures are based on United Nations estimates.

Project Purpose:

The Pilot Street Project is an outreach to families who have resettled in Roanoke City on refugee status. The project is a partnership between CSECP and the office of Refugee and Immigration Services and Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority. The project assists refugee families in achieving self-sufficiency through educational programs and cultural mediation support. In doing so, the Pilot Street Project fills a critical gap in services to high need, low literacy families who have exceeded the one year term of service sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, yet still requiring intensive support.

Project Objectives:

The cornerstone of the Pilot Street Project is the Adult ESL program. The purpose of this proposal is to request funding to expand Adult ESL so that more adults can access more opportunities for language learning. Our objectives for expanding Adult ESL are:

- To increase the number of instructional hours available to adult students from 864 to 1,112.
- To increase the number of adults taking ESL classes from 88 to 110
- To increase the number of hours each student attends classes by 50% or by 45 hours during the grant year.
- To demonstrate a level gain among 60% or 66 of the participating adult students.
- To diversify the kind of ESL opportunities available to adult students by supplementing the ongoing survival ESL curriculum with short courses related to citizenship preparation, financial and health literacy and communication, and writing for work-related purposes.
• To enhance the ESL experience for women with small children by providing early childhood / family literacy programming during morning programs.

**Project Design and Evaluation**

*Project Design*

The Project offers twelve 90-minute Adult ESL classes Mondays through Thursdays, at three public housing sites year round, providing a total of 864 available instructional hours. Adult classes use a Survival English curriculum based on practical commands and vocabulary used in daily life. “Lead Teachers” trained in adult ESL methodologies teach the classes. Virginia Tech students assist them by facilitating small-group activities within the larger classes.

Morning ESL classes are comprised mostly of women with pre-school aged children. When possible, a babysitter to cares for the children while their mothers are in class. We want to make the women’s ESL classes more impactful by hiring a Lead Teacher who adopts a family literacy approach that purposefully engages the children with their mother’s learning, and demonstrates literacy activities that can be applied at home.

We also want to supplement the existing Adult ESL schedule with short courses and workshops on Fridays or Saturdays. We propose 8-12 week courses that tie language learning to specific content areas that are of concern to newcomer populations, including: citizenship preparation, financial literacy, health literacy and communication, and writing for work purposes. A 12-week citizenship course in the Fall 2009 attracted 25 students, four of whom went on to pass their exam with high scores. The Project wants to make the Citizenship Course a regular part of its program offerings, with provisions for three courses offered annually. We also want to implement Friday afternoon workshops on Health Literacy and Communication Skills to be delivered by public health practitioners and targeted to older adults, as well as Writing for Work Purposes and Financial Literacy courses offered during the fall and spring semesters by advanced service-learning students in Technical Writing, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Business. These courses add 252 instructional hours to the adult ESL program.

**Timeline**

During the months of June through mid-August, the Project will:

• Conduct a 12-week citizenship course;
• Develop orientation and training materials for volunteer that focus on capacity-building objectives;
• Establish a schedule for fall and spring programming;
• Hire the Lead Teacher for the early childhood / family literacy program;
• Obtain baseline data about participant’s participation and proficiency levels.
Mid-August through September and Mid-January through February, the Project will:

- Recruit and train service-learning volunteers.

In September, the following new initiatives will begin and continue on a year round basis:

- Early Childhood / Family Literacy component of morning Adult ESL Classes.

In September, the following new initiatives will be conducted weekly for 12 sessions in conjunction with the academic calendar (September – November and February – April):

- Citizenship Course
- Writing for Work Purposes
- Health Literacy and Communication Skills
- Financial Literacy

Data about participation levels and proficiency gains will be collected at the end of each 12 week session for the short courses. Overall participation and proficiency will be measured against baseline data in May.

Criteria for Success

According to research by the Center for Applied Linguistics, there are general correlations between the number of instructional hours a student receives and the educational level gain students achieve, as well as between the intensity of instruction—defined as frequency of class attendance over a given period of time—and level gains. In a study of 6,599 students, 60% of the learners who received 100 hours of instruction over 75 days achieved NRS (National Reporting System for Adult Education) level gain—significantly higher than the overall average of 36% level gain reported for all students in federally funded programs in 2003-2004 (“Effects of Instructional Hours and Intensity of Instruction on NRS Level Gain in Listening and Speaking,” Sarah Young, CALdigest, December 2007). Based on this data, the Project has identified strategies for increasing instructional hours while also enabling more students to access these opportunities. Success will be determined by the following criteria:

- The number of instructional hours completed by each student
- The number of students increasing class intensity.
- The number of adults demonstrating level gains.
- The manner in which learner goals are achieved through application of new learning.

Assessment Methods

The Project will use the BEST Plus Oral English Proficiency Test (computer adaptive version). BEST Plus, developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), is an individually administered face-to-face adaptive oral interview designed to assess the English language proficiency of adult English language learners.
Completed test scores are expressed in terms of a BEST Plus score, Student Performance Levels (SPLs) 0-10, and are correlated to the six National Reporting System (NRS) Educational Functioning Levels for ESL. A graduate student in Teaching and Learning will be hired on a contractual basis to be trained in the administration of the BEST Plus Test.

Measurable Results

The Project anticipates the following results:

- A 50% increase in adult learners who complete a minimum of 90 instructional hours during a 15-week period. Currently, the typical Project student completes 45 hours over 15 weeks. The Lead Teachers and volunteers will maintain records of class attendance. A work-study student will log the hours by participant and class into an Excel spreadsheet.

- A 60% NRS level gain in language proficiency from pretest to posttest using the standardized oral proficiency assessment BEST Plus. The Project Evaluator (a graduate student in Teaching and Learning who has completed the six-hour BEST Plus certification training) will administer the pre and posttests.

- A 100% pass rate on practice quizzes by participants of the citizenship courses, demonstrating preparedness to take the official Citizenship Test. Practice quizzes are administered by the instructors at the end of the course. In addition to the language proficiency and citizenship preparedness outcomes, each course will establish its own outcomes related to new knowledge and application in the areas of health communication, writing for work purposes, and financial literacy. The Project Manager will train service-learning students to conduct interviews of course participants that identify new learning and how students have applied that learning to meet personal goals. Similarly, the Lead Teacher for the early childhood program will interview women to determine how the provision of child-care improved their ability to study English, and how they incorporated family literacy activities in daily interactions with their children.

Resource Capacity

Project Partners

Partners include external agencies, as well as units internal to Virginia Tech who contribute to components of the Project. The two primary external agency partners are the Office of Refugee and Immigration Services (RIS) and Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA). Internal partners include the Students In Free Enterprise Organization, the Technical Writing and Creative Writing graduate programs in the Department of English, and the Department of Teaching and Learning. The Somali Bantu Advisory Board is a community partner representing the interests of the Somali Bantu families.

Partner Responsibilities
RIS collaborates with the Project in meeting the educational needs of refugee populations. RIS provides an approved ESL volunteer training for new teachers, assists in the collection and reporting of data for outcomes, identifies community volunteers to supplement the Project’s student-centered volunteer staff, and participates in program planning and direction. The Roanoke Office of RIS has resettled over 4,000 refugees from Afghanistan, Bosnia, Burma, Cuba, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iraq, Laos, Cambodia, Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, Ukraine, and Vietnam since 1980.

RRHA provides community space for Project activities and, when appropriate, provides financial and material resources for programs. RRHA was established in July, 1949 with the approval of a resolution by Roanoke City Council legally creating, within the City of Roanoke, an independent political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Its mission includes providing programs and resources for residents that promote and encourage self-sufficiency, self-esteem and self determination.

Internal partners take responsibility for delivering program components such as Students in Free Enterprise and the Financial Literacy classes and the English Department and the Writing for Work Purposes classes. The Department of Teaching and Learning dedicates graduate level students in the ESL track to work with families needing individual tutoring beyond the scheduled classes. This department will also be consulted in the development of the Family Literacy / Early Childhood programming.

The Somali Bantu Board is comprised of sixteen Somali Bantu men and women, including community elders, who meet monthly with nine Project volunteers, faculty, and resettlement workers to communicate their concerns and make recommendations on community need.