



Northwest Iowa
Community College

603 West Park Street
Sheldon, Iowa 51201
Phone 712-324-5061 or
toll free 1-800-352-4907, Ext. 105

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NEWS RELEASE

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NCC's Learning Community Coffee

The students of the Northwest Iowa Community College's Learning Community held a coffee Friday, April 30, to honor their interview subjects and to present their oral history projects.

Their assignments were to interview a person who was at least 60 years old and who was not a relative. They were to ask them about living through historical events and how those events affected their lives and about career choices they had made throughout their lives.

Amy Jurrens, Communications Instructor, started off the event by welcoming all the visitors and saying, "Younger people are great at mastering events and dates and regurgitating them back on a test. But asking them to interview a person who actually lived through a historical event and understanding what the actual repercussions of an event had on an actual person brings history to life for the student. It helps the student understand the event on a personal level. We [the three Learning Community Instructors] wanted to show the students what happens in history really does matter and how events going on today will affect their lives."

Jurrens continued, "This assignment brought together three classes: Western Civilization II, Composition II, and Career Exploration. The students needed to research what historical events would have happened during the lifetime of the interviewee, write a paper about the interview and his or her findings, and ask why the person made the choices of a particular career. So you can see how the entire assignment and process fit the three classes they are taking right now."

Patricia Gonzalez, Associate of Arts student, Sioux Center, interviewed Edith Vanden Berg, Sanborn. Vanden Berg stated, "We learned to do without and make-do with what we had because of rationing during World War II. You couldn't travel like people do today. If you were lucky enough to travel by car it was only at 35 mph to get better fuel mileage because of the gas rationing. The community did manage to have enough gas for the school buses so we could attend school regularly.

Vanden Berg also told a story about why so many people her age have foot problems now that they are older. "Many people my age have bunions or crooked toes. It's because when we were growing up you only had one pair of shoes and you wore those until you absolutely just didn't fit into them anymore. Also, unless you were the oldest child in the family those shoes were probably second or even third hand. We would get the shoes resoled so the next person in the family could wear them," stated Vanden Berg. "You learned to economize a lot. You didn't have "plastic" to charge things on."

Another change Vanden Berg commented on is communication and how that has changed over the years. "When Pearl Harbor happened nobody knew it until late that afternoon. We found out because someone turned on the radio. They were very secretive about things that happened during the war. No one really knew what was going on. Now you know almost instantaneously when something happens around the world."

The Learning Community is a group of students who meet three times a week. The students take three classes with the same group of classmates in the same room. Faculty members collaborate to plan assignments so the students don't feel overwhelmed. Instead of writing a paper for English and another paper for Psychology you can combine your efforts and write just one paper for the combined assignment. The Learning Community offers built-in time to connect with classmates and faculty so students find it easier to fit everything in and make the transition to college easier.

Amy Jurrens, Communications Instructor, stated, "Students in the Learning Community have a sense of place and belonging at NCC. They are members of a group all working toward a common goal – creating the best possible future for themselves. Students in the Learning Community receive many benefits from their participation. They receive assignments that overlap two or three courses; they have professors who focus on connections between disciplines; and they have a support system built in to keep them moving ahead toward their goals."

Northwest Iowa Community College was one of the first community colleges in the state of Iowa to pilot a Learning Community program in 2006 and it has steadily grown ever since. Other community colleges from across the state have used NCC's Learning Community model of delivery to successfully start their own Learning Communities.

Pictured is Patricia Gonsalez and Edith Vanden Berg