

The CASS Program at HCC

The Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships (CASS) is a grant-funded training program created in 1989 by the federal government and sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). CASS is administered by Georgetown University's Center for Intercultural Education (CIED) in Washington, D.C., in partnership with U.S. institutions of higher education. The CASS program represents a means of reaching and uplifting socio-economically disadvantaged, but talented young adults from Latin America and the Caribbean.

HCC started with the CASS program in 2001 and recently welcomed another cycle of CASS participants. On August 13, 2008, a new group of 20 international scholars arrived from Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua. They are full-time students at HCC-Brandon Campus who, besides their many academic, cultural, and civic responsibilities, contribute to the local communities, volunteering their time in non-profit organizations such as Metropolitan Ministries, Ronald McDonald House, Meals on Wheels, Shriners Hospital, Hands On Tampa Bay, and several other institutions, completing a minimum of 160 volunteer hours while they are living in the U.S.

The CASS students, during their first nine months in the U.S., live with host families who encourage them to get adapted to American customs and to maintain focus on his/her scholarship and studies. They also teach the CASS participants about the responsibilities of independent living in preparation for moving into their own apartments. The host families get the benefit of mingling with them in social and recreational events and developing an everlasting friendship with people of different nationalities.

In the last semester at HCC, the CASS scholars participate in internships related to their field of study in manufacturing engineering technology in companies located in Tampa, Brandon, Plant City, and other surrounding areas. At the completion of the two-year training, they return to their home countries as leaders and agents of change to contribute to the development and progress of their native nations.

CASS Students Cycle 2008-2010 at the CASS Program Office, Brandon Campus.



CASS "Mix of Cultures" with project manager Mery Young and CASS students wearing native costumes from Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

Several people and entities have the opportunity to interact with the various international cultural backgrounds and achievements of the CASS participants. All the contacts and public relations done through the CASS program help to build a stronger relationship with HCC, the local community, and other countries. Our best wishes of success to the CASS students of Cycle 2008-2010 during their learning experience in the United States.

Mery M. Young
CASS Project Manager
HCC Brandon Campus



CASS students in first week of training at HCC.

Measuring the Scale of Your Success

By Craig S. Kasper, Program Manager, Aquaculture

"Success usually is achieved by taking baby steps, then jumping off the cliff and praying your parachute actually opens."

—Anonymous

Edgy? Good. Now that I have your attention, let me share with you a special measure of success at HCC. After much toil and trouble, students at HCC sold their first fish, along with about 2,000 of his companions! Yeah, you read it right. Fish. Those air-breathing, "cold-blooded," blood-pressure-lowering-when-you-watch-them, feel-good, ornamental fish. The journey has been both challenging and rewarding.

Do you remember that sensation you get when you finish a long, hard, arduous task and everything still turns out okay; only then realizing that you've got to do it all over again the next day? Ever heard "See you tomorrow!" following days like that one? Sound like your everyday work schedule, or one you might think twice about attempting in the first place? That is how aquaculture students feel when they finish bagging the last of the day's fish to be sent to the wholesaler. It's a good feeling. One that keeps them coming back for more!



For the last three years, the aquaculture program at HCC has been experiencing growth. Infrastructure is continually being developed, enrollment continues to improve, and more students are becoming interested in what raising aquatic animals and plants means to the Hillsborough community and to Florida agriculture.

Two words come to mind in describing the attitudes of the current group of HCC students and their endeavors: tenacity and courage. They should be commended for hard work and a desire to succeed. Over the summer of 2007, HCC students worked long hours to raise and sell South American cichlids and other species of ornamental fish. Selling marketable fish generates revenue which will then be used to help supplement program expenses. Their work

continues this fall semester with the inclusion of six new African cichlid species, new tank systems, and increased responsibility of student managers who will oversee incoming aquaculture students and assist them in focusing on greenhouse fish production and sales.

So the next time you hear someone on campus talking about raising fish or working in the hottest place at HCC, you'll know they are part of HCC's aquaculture elite. I am especially proud of all who have helped move this project forward in the midst of challenging times. I even held onto their first dollar for posterity.