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&
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Wake Nature Preserves Partnership

Our Partnership is a signature example of Patti's approach to community-campus engagement: the development and nurturing of partnerships that are self-supporting, mutually transformative, and sustainable. Her approach is focused, deeply committed, nurturing rather than controlling, and relentlessly scholarly

Wake Nature currently includes some eight state agencies and non-governmental organizations, each of which has a mission related to open space conservation. Our focus, like Patti's, is on building mission-relevant capacity in multiple organizations that protect open space in Wake County by providing examples, identifying and organizing resources, and transforming relationships among the organizations. Signs of transformation are already visible: enhanced communication among organizations, wider sharing of information across organizational boundaries, and a willingness to put aside parochial interests to better conserve open space.

Our partnership flourishes in the context of the Engaged College Initiative, between the Center and the College of Natural Resources, to make engagement part of the very fabric of the College and community organizations. Indeed, a key long-term goal of the Initiative is for the College and agencies like Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space to develop synergistic relationships to the point of participating in one another's strategic planning. Although activities of the Engaged College Initiative are coordinated and carried out by people like us – faculty, community organizations, and students – Patti conceived it, developed initial funding, and continues to support us. None of this would have occurred without Patti's leadership, encouragement, and deep commitment to campus-community engagement.

Wake Nature is at the center of this Initiative, serving as a major project around which faculty can develop engaged courses and activities, as well as professional development opportunities. For example, Patti helped us design a service-learning immersion experience for faculty, community partners, and graduate students interested in engaged learning and Wake Nature. This immersion experience brought additional faculty members, community partners, and students into our Partnership and transformed the way some of the participants thought about engaged learning. It was during this workday that I [Chris] realized fully the potential of this partnership. I had always been committed to the process, but witnessing collaboration and communication focused simultaneously on the missions of all involved during that one afternoon made me more committed than ever! All of the "talk" of the previous several months was transformed into action benefiting faculty and students as well as open space owned by Wake County. We saw and learned about new plants and animals, documented threats to natural heritage on the property, collected data, and conveyed this information to one another immediately and graphically. It was extremely exciting! The Partnership's work is becoming central to the County's open space mission, promotes faculty research, and greatly enhances the learning experience for all involved – the products of this Partnership will not gather dust on a shelf.

Allow us to pause here for a moment, because this might appear to be more about us than it is about Patti. That is precisely the point. Patti's mode of operation is always focused away from herself and toward the faculty, partners, and students she supports. Partnership with the Center is not Patti's goal. Her goal is transformative, self-sustaining partnerships among community organizations, academic units, and faculty. Instead of inserting herself into the day-to-day operations of Wake Nature – a model that will not scale up to the larger campus – the Center provides training opportunities, helps identify and obtain funding for our efforts, and creates a variety of forums for promoting leadership among community partners, faculty, and students.