

# GENERAL EDUCATION NEWS

From the California State University, Sacramento Office of Academic Affairs

## New GE Honors Program

*By George S. Craft, Professor  
of History*

In the 1960s, Sacramento State College had an active GE Honors Program that disappeared just after 1970 amidst the political and administrative upheaval of the era. A group of faculty members—including Andrew Hertzoff of Government, Sue Holl of Mechanical Engineering, and myself-- began to design a new honors program in 1998; it was approved by the Faculty Senate in April and is slated for inauguration in Fall 2006.

The Honors Program is intended to fill an important gap in Sacramento State's academic programs – whereas numerous programs have been designed for various groups of students, like athletes and disadvantaged students, there has been none for highly motivated and academically well-prepared students. Interviews with selected students enrolled in the university give clear indications that more ambitious students are aware that there is little available specifically for them in General Education. Members of the committee are confident that there are also a large number of

these kinds of students in high schools throughout California who will respond enthusiastically to the existence of the Honors Program at Sacramento State.

The new program will consist primarily of lower division Honors classes taken by entering freshmen in their first four semesters at Sacramento State; there will also be an upper division component of 9-12 units that students will fulfill in their junior and senior years. Honors students are being recruited from high schools in the Sacramento area; upon enrollment at Sacramento State they will form a "cohort" of 60 students that will remain together as a group until their graduation. The program will eventually enroll about 240 students.

Students will take the following courses together in their first four semesters at Sacramento State.

### Semester 1

Honors 1  
Math 15H  
History 50H

### Semester 2

Honors 2  
COMS 4H  
History 51H

### Semester 3

Honors 3  
Govt 1H  
Anth 2H

### Semester 4

Honors 4  
Bio 10H  
Additional Social Science course

Each semester Honors students will take three Honors designated courses designed to challenge them intellectually and to fulfill their General Education requirements. The courses will have small enrollments of 25-30 students to enable an atmosphere of active learning and student participation. The courses will have an interdisciplinary approach that supports other course offerings, and Honors courses in the humanities and social sciences will have a global orientation. The core of the curriculum will be a four-semester Honors seminar in which students will read some of the great books of world civilizations.

As Interim Director, I think that the Honors Program will improve the university's standing in the Sacramento community by sending out the message that Sacramento State cares about academic excellence.

Although there is little scholarship money currently available for entering Honors students, I am hoping that the university will be able to offer them small scholarships of \$500 in their first year. I'm now working with the university's Development Office to design a fund-raising strategy to support the new Honors Program in future years.

The Admissions Office and the Honors faculty have just begun recruiting students for next year. Although there are the usual worries accompanying the creation of a new program, the faculty on the Honors Committee are confident that the bright students in this exciting new program will have a beneficial impact on our campus.

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### **Service-Learning in General Education and Learning Communities**

*By Charlotte Cook, Professor of Education and Director Emerita of the Office of Community Collaboration*

Service Learning (SL) engages students in learning subject-matter for a course, while servicing a community agency. When done well, service learning yields benefits beyond mastery of course material. Positive outcomes also include strengthening of critical thinking, problem-solving and communication skills (Eyler J. & Giles, D., 1999).

The Sac State Office of Community Collaboration (OCC) supports service learning by developing community partnerships to enhance our students' education. OCC identifies community partners whose need for services matches students' needs for learning. Thus Computer Science students develop or update databases and websites. English students revise promotional materials or technical manuals, or serve as writing partners for elementary age students.

Students report advances in personal development as a result of SL: increased confidence in dealing with new tasks and unexpected situations, new knowledge about personal strengths and weaknesses, clarification of career plans. SL students tend to have higher class attendance rates (Astin et al., 2000). In one study comparing SL and non-SL students in the same course, the SL group agreed more strongly than their non-SL peers with the statement that the course material would be useful to them in real life (Evangelopoulos et al., 2003).

All of the above are among the outcomes that lower division GE courses and learning communities strive for. Working on a real-world project is also a vehicle for animating class discussion and building community within a classroom. SL catapults

students into the role of mature adults who have the capacity to learn without their professor in the room. It also changes their investment in the quality of their work. They often reason that "it's OK to slide by with a B- " if they are writing a paper for an instructor's eyes only. If they are writing a report that will be used by real people to address real issues, however, the stakes are higher: the work has to merit an "A."

Finally, SL leads students to more deeply define their personal identity. It brings them to questions such as: How can I use my education to advance my community as well as my career? What knowledge, skills and abilities do I have? What do I really enjoy doing? What am I good at? How do I want to contribute? These questions are at the core of developing a sense of one's role in a democratic society, and SL brings them front and center.

Faculty interested in learning more about service-learning (in GE courses, Learning Community courses, or other courses), should:

- contact the Office of Community Collaboration at 278-4610,
- visit their offices in the Library, Room 4028, or;
- check out their website at [www.csus.edu/occ](http://www.csus.edu/occ)

## REFERENCES

Astin, A.W., Vogelgesang, L.J., Ikeda, E. K., Yee, J.A. (2000). *How Service Learning Affects Students: Executive Summary*. University of California, Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute.

Evangelopoulos, N. Sidorova, A.. & Riolli, L. (2003). Can service-learning help students appreciate an unpopular course?: A theoretical framework. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 9,15-24.

Eyler, J.S., & Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning ?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Editor's Note: *Several GE and Learning Community classes employ service-learning pedagogy to reap the benefits outlined above. Among those classes, are Ana Garcia-Nevarez's Child Development Class, which is part of a learning community and Catherine Gabor's English 20, which is a graduation requirement for all students. Below, Garcia-Nevarez and Gabor explain how their students met and went beyond the expected learning outcomes by using service-learning.*

### **English 20 Goes Public: Service-Learning as a Bridge to Future Writing** *By Catherine Gabor, Assistant Professor of English*

My section of English 20 was designed to build upon the writing strategies students learned in English 1A and serve as a bridge to their future writing endeavors, in upper-division writing intensive classes and beyond—in their future careers. In order to accomplish these learning goals, the students engaged in both academic and public writing projects. With the assistance of the Sac State Office of Community Collaboration, I formed a mutually beneficial partnership with a Sacramento-based non-profit organization: the Inter-Tribal Council of California (ITCC). The ITCC specified five writing projects that they needed; my students worked in groups to co-author documents that would have a viable public life beyond the walls of the classroom, at the same time, they got writing instruction regarding argument, analysis, audience, style, and sentence-level concerns. The English 20 assignments were win-win endeavors: the ITCC got much-needed writing projects completed, and my students got “real world” writing experience.

The ITCC requested the following writing projects:

- A Quarterly Newsletter
- Revision of By-Laws and an Introduction

to the ITCC for new members

- A History of the ITCC
- Formal Descriptions for each of their community programs
- A History of California Indians for a “general public” audience

Our class spent more than six weeks, researching, interviewing, drafting, and revising these writing projects. At each turn, students learned academic content and helped their fellow citizens. Each group wrote multiple drafts, reviewed by me, by their classmates, and by officers of the ITCC. The meticulous writing process helped groups produce the best possible product for publication for a real-world audience.

The class culminated in group presentations, attended by our ITCC community partners, as well as members of the OCC staff and English Department faculty, all of whom were very impressed. Dr. Charlotte Cook, who attended the presentations, commended the students; she said, “In nine years I have never heard students articulate their learning outcomes so cogently.” She and the students both credited service-learning as a major contributor to the students’ ability to identify and express what they had learned in English 20. One student sums up how service-learning helped him

understand the value of GE courses: "I learned the most from the service-learning project that we did for the ITCC. It took all the knowledge from the classroom and out it into a real-life working environment. So many times I do projects because I have to, but the service learning project was different. It seemed like it was for a cause instead of a grade. It had the feeling of a group working towards a goal."

### **Service Learning as Part of a Learning Community**

*By Ana Garcia-Nevarez,  
Assistant Professor  
of Child Development*

Service learning pedagogy and the Learning Community Program structure easily allowed my cohorted students interested in a teaching career to integrate multidisciplinary course work with required field experiences at a low income, culturally diverse local elementary school site. For example, my students, who have an interest in the teaching profession, are co-enrolled in an introductory human development course (CHDV 35, taught by Natalie Piece), a general education English course (English 1A, taught by Lynne Klyse) and an early field experience service learning course that requires 40 hours of internship (CHDV 35F, taught by me). The three of us agreed to a required reading of Jonathan Kozol's

book, Savage Inequalities, and collaborated on relevant curriculum assignments for each course. Students were able to apply theories and research about developmental issues facing children, parents, and teachers in low income schools. They researched and wrote essays about issues facing these populations; and, students were able to reflect on and discuss their experiences working in a culturally diverse, low income elementary school.

End-of-the-semester reflection essays overwhelmingly suggest that service-learning field experiences positively impact students' engagement in and attitudes toward urban, culturally and ethnically diverse public schools and their surrounding communities. As one student commented in an end of the semester paper, "I am very excited about working with culturally diverse students because they were able to teach me something that I could never learn from a teacher." Additionally, many students expressed that the experience in the classroom brought them awareness to the challenges and the training they need to have in order to work with English language learners and special needs children. They were able to recognize the unique challenges teachers face in these

environments at the same time that they found their personal experience very rewarding.

In addition to helping students learn more about the teaching professions, students also completed projects that promote social and civic responsibilities. These projects are intended to instill in students that advocacy is an integral role of the teacher. One example of a CHDV 35F project is "Red Ribbon Week" in which students focused on the dangers of drug use and promoted health, drug free and violence-free lifestyle among youth. College students organized and developed lesson plans for different grade levels. For example, they taught lessons that encouraged elementary students to read and write about the dangers of drugs.

### ***Learning Community student teaches elementary class about seasons***



College students also talked to parents and sent them information on how to talk to their children about drugs and how to identify drug use. This service-learning experience provided me with many opportunities to encourage critical and reflective thinking as students linked course-based subject matter to the "real world."

Service learning courses within a learning community offer college students the opportunity to work with a diverse elementary student population and be actively involved within that community. Students gain depth of knowledge as they apply theory and research, while reinforcing their interest in pursuing a teaching career. In addition, through our collaboration, Natalie Pierce, Lynne Klyse, and I were able to plan curriculum with a common strand. This process of collaboration brought students and faculty to new levels of thinking, learning, and teaching.

### **LEARNING COMMUNITIES:**

#### **PRESENT AND FUTURE**

*By Lynn M. Tashiro, Physics Professor and Faculty Coordinator for the University Learning Community Program*

As Faculty Coordinator for the University Learning Community Program, I'd like to echo some of the observations that Cindi SturtzSreetharan and Jeanne Rodgers made

about the Learning Community Programs in the Spring 2005 issue of the GE Newsletter (see <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/ge/GESPR05.pdf>). And, I'll add a few observations of my own.

#### **MODELS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE**

It is true that national exemplary Learning Community Programs support the professional development of their faculty through workshops and compensate faculty for the responsibility of thematic subject matter integration and extra curricular collaboration. It is also true that Learning Community Programs have failed due to lack of institutional support.

#### **WHERE IS OUR PROGRAM?**

With limited resources, Sac State has built a University Learning Community Program that is solid in content and stable in operation. This fall we have 20 communities containing courses from 16 departments. 95% of available seats were filled during summer orientation. This program has been built upon the intellectual generosity and dedication of the Learning Community faculty and their academic departments under the leadership of the previous Learning Community Coordinator, Sheree Meyer. Although there have not been funds to compensate faculty for their time or to offset the cost of limiting

enrollment to 25 in popular courses, institutional support has been present. Academic Affairs has hosted a yearly convocation for Learning Community faculty, provided peer mentors to advise students and facilitate the community, and provided travel stipends for faculty presenting scholarly work on Learning Communities.

#### **WHY DO FACULTY PARTICIPATE?**

There are many reasons. Some faculty are looking to make early connections and establish advising relationships with major students, some want to connect with faculty outside their discipline to place their own work in a different, often applied, context and finally there are some, who by circumstance (often as a result of last minute schedule changes), find themselves as new volunteers in the Learning Community Program. However they arrive, the one element they have in common is that they are intellectual risk takers who are open to different teaching and learning paradigms.

#### **WHAT DO WE (FACULTY) NEED?**

Although the core of our program is strong we are not reaping the full benefits of our work. In comparison to highly visible and successful national programs, what we are most lacking are opportunities for faculty

professional development. We need to buy time for experienced faculty to collect, document and disseminate best practices in Learning Community teaching and learning; and, we need to buy time for new faculty to engage in workshops that provide tools for "getting started" and managing a collaborative instructional team. Achieving these goals will help to make the Sac State Learning Community Program exemplary.

#### HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET WHAT WE NEED?

This is my job. This is a tough job. I have two strategies. First, the work and measurable outcomes of the Learning Community Program are in excellent alignment with the "Facilitating Graduation" directives (Recommendations 3,4 &5) issued by the Chancellor's office. I will find out how these recommendations will be implemented and if appropriate request support for Learning Community work that would aid in the process. Second, I have started a dialog with Learning Community

faculty, the Office of Community Collaboration and external funding sources to see if we can take what we are currently doing to the next level and align what we want to do with what is fundable. We must realize, however, that we cannot get funding for "business as usual" -- but we might be able to for "innovative," "technology savvy," or "socially relevant" cutting edge projects.

#### WHAT ARE WE DOING IN THE MEAN TIME?

In partnership with academic affairs, student affairs, and peer mentor students, the Learning Community faculty are continuing their good work. With limited resources some faculty, such as Cindi SturtzSreetharan and Jeanne Rodgers can be supported to give presentations and all leaning communities have been given a peer mentor to facilitate their learning community. Peer mentors have the responsibility of facilitating community building activities. For example, in Fall 2004, peer mentor, Kim Purcell, arranged for her Criminal

Justice Learning Community to tour the local CHP.



***Students from the Criminal Justice Community take a tour of the local CHP academy***

Photo taken by campus photographer Sam Parsons

I'm an optimistic that if we can think a bit "out of the box" that the future will bring the Learning Community Program opportunities to build on and disseminate the good work we are already doing.

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#### **GE NEWSLETTER**

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