Executive Director Message

The Center for California Studies is committed to strengthening our state’s democratic system by connecting the resources of academia to California’s governmental apparatus. To advance that mission, the Center in 2002 adopted a strategic plan with specific objectives that would be carried out over the ensuing decade. This spring we have undertaken a new strategic planning process to develop renewed goals and objectives for the Center to carry out its mission through 2020.

Our new strategic plan responds to issues that weren’t entirely evident a decade ago: the slow climb out of a prolonged recession, critical environmental challenges, the effect of (modified) term limits on state leadership, the weakening of our two-party system, and a changed relationship between academia and government. We are charting a new course that allows us to continue providing robust experiential education for future government leaders; promotes civic literacy among our citizens; and strengthens the vital link between academic research and effective public policy, while embracing the ideals and promise of our great state.

Key to our efforts is collaboration with a variety of important partners. We work closely with all three branches of the state government, with local officials and organizations, with schools and college campuses throughout the state, and with other entities. In fact, earlier this spring we convened a meeting of leaders from 10 academic and nonprofit organizations whose work relates to the Center’s mission. I see this as an important step in strengthening the Center’s partnerships and leveraging a broad coalition toward the achievement of our shared goals. I welcome your thoughts and suggestions about how the Center can best advance these ideals in the years to come.

Finally, the Center has a number of events coming up in the next few months. Please see below for dates and details and check our website for updates.

Center Events

May 1: California Through My Eyes LegiSchool photo contest deadline (photos displayed at the Capitol in June)

Late May: Presentation of Civics Teacher of the Year Award, Baldwin Park

May 28 - 30: 15th Annual State Politics & Policy Conference, Sacramento State Campus

June 17: Visiting Scholar Presentation, Delta Narratives, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m., CSAC Conference Center, 1020 11th Street, Sacramento

June 17 - July 24: LegiSchool Real World Civics Summer Internship, Sacramento

July 18 - 25: Legislative Staff Management Institute (LSMI), USC State Capital Center, 1800 I Street, Sacramento

October 2: 26th Annual Envisioning California Conference, California’s Liquid Gold: Brewing and Wine Making in the Golden State & 21st Annual California Journalism Awards, Tsakopoulos Library Galleria, Sacramento

*photo credit: KRA
The LegiSchool Project: Spring Summary

This spring, LegiSchool has been busy connecting students and state leaders! Our February Town Hall brought together students from Hayward and Sacramento to discuss the future of corrections in California. Students spoke with a panel of policy experts to learn about realignment, prison reform and much, much more. Scott Budnick, producer of the movie The Hangover, ignited the crowd with his surprise visit to the Town Hall. He discussed the work of his organization, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition.

Our essay contest this year centered on one of the hottest topics in California: climate change. We received a record number of entries featuring insightful viewpoints from our youth about the role of government in addressing climate change. On April 15, the state-wide winners of the contest came to the Capitol to speak with policy experts and take a VIP tour of the building. The highlight of their day? Meeting their local legislators! Thanks to Assemblymembers Gallagher, Allen, Aleyo, Bonta, Chu, Bloom and Senator Allen for taking the time to make their day.

We are continuing to urge students to think critically and express themselves creatively with our “California Through My Eyes” photo contest, which is now underway. Entries are due May 1! Details at www.csus.edu/calist/contests.html.

For more information on the LegiSchool Project visit: csus.edu/calist/legischool_project.html

Photos: (left) Essay Contest winners Elie Nehm and Brendan Terry meet Senator Allen (right) A student from Sacramento High School engages with her peers at the February Town Hall

2015 LegiSchool Teacher of the Year

Margarita Berdeja
Kenmore Elementary - 3rd Grade
Baldwin Park, CA

Ms. Berdeja won our 2015 Teacher of the Year award for her innovative instructional techniques that foster civic learning in her third grade classroom. She uses “student-centric” project based learning, allowing student input to drive both the selection of projects and their outcomes. With guidance from Ms. Berdeja, students create their own classroom rules as a means of understanding how our constitution was developed, and why it is important. She turns a reading on the endangered red wolf into a lesson on being a good steward, where her students write letters to the US Fish and Wildlife Service to provide input on the future of the red wolf sanctuary in North Carolina. Ms. Berdeja incorporates civic learning into everything the students do, no matter the subject area. Through her lessons, each student learns the value they have as citizens, both now and in the future. As one of her students noted so eloquently, she teaches kids “that even though you are little, you can do BIG things!”

Fellowship Program Mentor Profile: Gary Winuk

The Capital Fellowship Programs rely upon the commitment of outstanding government professionals to serve as mentors for our 64 fellows every year. One such person, Gary Winuk, has served as a mentor for the Executive Fellowship Program for 15 years. As an official in the Executive Branch for three administrations, most recently as the Chief of the Enforcement Division of the FPPC, Gary has been a tremendous resource for the Capital Fellows Program. A native of Fort Lee, New Jersey, Gary got his own start in Sacramento as an Assembly Legislative Aide, and at each step in his career path, mentors were important.

“I was fortunate to have several key mentors in my career through today. In each phase, I had people guide me, show me the ropes and give me the perspective and tools to succeed.” As a mentor, Gary took these lessons to heart in providing young professionals with similar positive guidance. “I try to do the same thing, for the fellows placed with me over the past 16 years.” Now in private practice, Gary looks back at his time as a mentor fondly. “Being a mentor in the Executive Fellowship program was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Having lifelong relationships with my Fellows and their Fellow Fellows, and watching them grow, develop and flourish has been a true privilege.” He offers young professionals advice about finding mentors. “When you meet someone whose work you admire and respect, reach out to them and establish a relationship where you can talk with them and get advice. Most successful people are very open to this and probably had their own mentor along the way.”

Former Fellow Profile: Julian Leichty, Executive Fellow 2012-13

Julian Leichty grew up in Fresno and was an Executive Fellow from 2012-2013 at the California Environmental Protection Agency. His mentor was Assistant Secretary for Environmental Justice Anesio Mataka. As a fellow, he was part of a team that released a first-in-the-nation environmental health screening tool. The tool is designed to help decision-makers improve the environmental health of Californians living in areas of the state disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of pollution. He also worked on CalEPA’s environmental justice report to the Legislature and a compliance and enforcement effort that focused on Fresno. “I found it extremely rewarding to be able to contribute to efforts to advance environmental justice and economic vitality in my hometown and around the state,” he says. “I was drawn to the fellowship program because I wanted to work for the common good and advance thoughtful decisions. After my year as a fellow I can say I believe even more firmly than when I started in the ability of state government to improve the lives of Californians.”

Julian graduated from Brown University in 2006 with a degree in Public Policy and Education Studies. He was a Fulbright Fellow in Taiwan from 2006 to 2007 and has also worked for the education policy non-profit EdSource as a research consultant and research assistant. He is currently a special assistant at the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, working in its Office of External and Legislative Affairs.

Immediately before the fellowship, Julian studied Mandarin Chinese at National Taiwan University’s International Chinese Language Program.

He has fond memories of his fellowship experience. “The fellowship provided me with a tremendous opportunity to work with and learn from dedicated public servants,” he says. “It was also exciting and unpredictable – I learned something new almost every day, but I never knew in advance exactly how each day would unfold. My year as an Executive Fellow was genuinely transformative. I would suggest that fellows be open to a wide range of policy areas and projects, as a project that seems mundane initially could change as the year progresses. I would also encourage them to spend as much time as they can learning from their mentors and others inside and outside of state government. Learning about the career paths and interests of others is extremely helpful as you prepare for ‘life after the fellowship’ and think about what you would like to pursue.”

Julian's fellow profile is featured on the Center for California Studies 2015 Spring Newsletter.
Hodson Assistance Fund

The Timothy A. Hodson Capital Fellows Assistance Fund was established in 2012 after the passing of longtime Center Executive Director, Tim Hodson. The Fund continues Tim’s vision of nurturing young public servants who may not otherwise have the means to participate in the program. Since its inception these funds have provided numerous Capital Fellows with the critical financial bridge needed to start the fellowship, covering costs ranging from housing deposit to professional wardrobe. As we prepare for the 2015-16 interviews, we once again look to the generous support of Center friends and supporters to help replenish the Timothy A. Hodson Capital Fellows Assistance Fund in support of future Capital Fellows. For more information contact Pam Chueh at 916-278-6906.

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