Conference helps build new generation of leaders

Promising high school students from throughout California visited Sacramento State from July 21-28 for a leadership conference.

This year's conference marked the 30th anniversary of a program that has paid dividends in helping thousands of at-risk students maximize their potential.

Students learned about college, state government and getting along in the workaday world during their weeklong stay. Their activities included guest lectures about California’s public policy process, meetings with Latino legislators and role-playing in public policy development.

The conference also featured a college fair with representatives from some of the nation’s best institutions of higher learning. This exposure is especially important because many of the program’s students come from economically disadvantaged homes and would be the first in their families to attend college.

Sacramento State President Alexander Gonzalez welcomed the groups to campus. His remarks were especially relevant because he was the first in his family to earn a college degree. He makes it a point during each Commencement to recognize newly minted graduates who can say the same.

The Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project’s programs connect young people with community volunteers, policymakers and professionals to “motivate leadership and civic engagement by strengthening cultural identity, self-confidence and community connections, and open doors to academic achievement, career growth and leadership opportunities.”

The African-American Leaders for Tomorrow Program (AALTP) is geared toward giving students tools to succeed in many areas, including leadership, state and local government, financial literacy, and career exploration through intense, hands-on training.

The California Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) for Students with Disabilities conducted an intensive five-day program specifically for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities.
More than 1,200 California YLF alumni are now pursuing higher education, are gainfully employed, are developing as local, state and national leaders, and are living independently in our communities. Many of them consider the program a life-changing experience.

“YLF was the first time I was ever exposed to positive role models with disabilities, which completely gave me a new perspective of my life,” says Gina Semenza, a program participant in 1998 who now works as a field representative for Sen. Barbara Boxer.

Stanford graduate and community organizer Jessica Lehman, Class of 1993, agrees. “The lessons I have learned at YLF, and continue to learn through the Alumni Alliance, have allowed me to develop and succeed.”

More than 3,000 students have gone through the Chicano-Latino program, with more than 90 percent attending college. Comparable success stories can be found among graduates of the other two programs. These impressive track records underscore the value of Sacramento State’s annual leadership conferences, which also forge new friendships among California students. It’s one more example of the University’s commitment to help cultivate a new generation of leaders who can make a difference in their communities.

For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156.

– Alan Miller
amiller@csus.edu

Sacramento State is making a difference in California’s Capital Region and beyond. We offer a life-changing opportunity for our 28,000 students, preparing them to be leaders in their professions and communities. Our professors are known for their dedication to great teaching. And our location in the capital of the nation’s most populous state allows students to pursue unique internships and research.

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