Dec. 6, 2012

View video of Steve Boilard and the newest Capital Fellows.

**Sac State alum takes reins of venerable Center for California Studies**

Steve Boilard is mindful of the past as he settles in as executive director of the celebrated Center for California Studies at Sacramento State.

His predecessor, Tim Hodson, ran the Center for 18 years, until his death in October 2011. The Center was without a permanent leader until Boilard took over three months ago.

“I’m working on reinvigorating relationships that Tim forged with people and organizations around the state, and building on the goodwill he created,” Boilard says. “I recognize that an organization like this doesn’t just appear. It takes hard work and a sense of vision. I’m humbled by that. I recognize that I’ve been entrusted with this legacy, and I want to continue the momentum of doing good things for the state of California.”

The Center for California Studies was founded in 1982. It pursues its mission to strengthen democratic governance in California in a variety of ways, including running fellowship programs in all three branches of state government, furthering research and public discussions on state policy issues, and promoting civic education among high school students.

Boilard, 51, came to his new job after 14 years in the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst’s Office, where he focused on higher education policy and budgets. Prior to that, he taught at Western Kentucky University and UC Santa Barbara, where he had earned a Ph.D. in political science. He also has a master’s degree in government from Sacramento State.

“I feel well positioned, because I have a lot of experience in both the world of academia and the world of policy,” he says. “Those two worlds don’t talk together all the time.”

The Center for California Studies is best known as administrator of the nationally acclaimed Capital Fellows Programs. Each year, 64 college graduates from around the
country are selected for full-time, paid positions in the legislative, judicial and executive branches of California government. The jobs last for up to 11 months.

The goal is to build a new generation of leaders for California.

Vault.com honored the Capital Fellows as one of the nation’s top 10 internships in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

In addition to the Fellows Programs, the Center for California Studies’ work includes the annual Envisioning California Conference, the California Journalism Awards and the LegiSchool Project for high school students.

“These other activities are, I think, somewhat less structured and formalized than the Fellows Programs, and I would like to sharpen and focus what we do in civic engagement and civic literacy efforts,” Boilard says. “The Center for California Studies is based in Sacramento – the state capital – and on the campus of Sacramento State. So we are well-positioned to have a much higher profile in the state as an authority on California matters.

“A lot of organizations do similar work, and I would like for us to be the hub that connects entities around the state that are all trying to promote a better understanding of government and better governance in California.”

In his first three months on the job, Boilard has traveled around the state, strengthening relationships with partners such as the Edmund G. “Pat” Brown Institute of Public Affairs at CSU Los Angeles, the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at the University of Southern California, and UC Berkeley’s Institute of Governmental Studies.

“There are so many opportunities for collaboration, and I have to figure out which organizations and individuals we can work with to promote better citizen engagement,” he says. “Citizens can feel disconnected from their government. They don’t always understand how their government works, how policies are made, how the budget is decided or how the initiative process works. So I think people feel that the government is very remote.

“What we’re trying to do is to re-energize, re-engage the citizens of this state to reclaim their government. This is a representative, democratic state where people get to choose their leaders. The people get to run the show. It’s important for them to understand not just their rights but also their responsibilities as citizens,” Boilard says. “I think that’s critical for our state’s future.”

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