

Learning by

What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?

~ Jean Jacques Rousseau

(French/Swiss writer/philosopher 1712-78)

courses with service components. It also aids in addressing significant community problems and contributes to the university's goal of preparing graduates who will seek out future civic service.

Class and Community Connections

For students who take classroom learning into the community, there is only one "real world."

"We hyphenate 'service-learning' for good reason," says Lutrin. "Students take class learning out into their work with local nonprofit agencies, and bring back their experiences to enrich their education." She opens her hands palms up. "It's a two-way street."

In the Class and Community Connections program, students sign up for classes where they are awarded credit for what they learn from a service experience (*not* for number of hours served).

When a quarter starts, students are introduced to the service-learning components of a specific class. A service-learning paper will be required at the end of the term, and specific questions may also be assigned that connect volunteer work to classroom and text topics.

Results have shown that Cal Poly students who choose service-learning classes learn more than those in more traditional courses.

The comfortably cluttered office of Community Service Programs Director Sam Lutrin is Mission Control for Cal Poly's Community Service and Learning Center. From her desk in front of a large University Union window, she takes multiple phone calls, jots down a message from a flashing answering machine, and pauses to answer a visitor's questions.

The center is the university's link between theory and practice in the field. Its staff is dedicated to helping Cal Poly students in all majors find meaningful service experiences through ongoing, student-directed projects and events, club-sponsored efforts, and



Clients and students work together in a greenhouse at San Luis Obispo's Growing Grounds. The nursery was awarded a certificate of environmental

These data are in line with major national studies such as several by Alexander Astin (director of UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute), who observes that participation in service during a student's undergraduate years enhances academic development, civic responsibility, and life skills in general.

In an April *L.A. Times* interview, Astin also notes that students become better critics of classroom theory. "When they serve people in the field, they realize the limitations of the theory, so it isn't that they're just parroting something back out of a textbook."



A grateful boarder at Woods Humane Society gives a smooch to Kimra Aquino, a master's candidate in guidance and counseling. (Photo by Steve Schueneman)

giving back

by Vicki Hanson and Colleen Walsh (JOUR '00)



achievement by Renew America, a national nonprofit organization that seeks out innovative environmental programs. (Photo by Doug Allen)

Thanks to three years of funding support from the Cal Poly Plan, a variety of classes now offer service-learning options or components. They range from courses in the economics of poverty, discrimination, and immigration (where students work with low-income clients in nonprofit organizations such as Head Start and Transitions-Mental Health Association) to English classes where students write up agency problems and outline solutions.

"This is one of our most successful programs," says Lutrin. "So far we've gotten really good matches between agencies and classes."

Student Community Services

Student Community Services has been Cal Poly's premier service program for the past 25 years. Volunteers can participate in projects mentoring children, working with at-risk youth and homeless individuals, providing companionship for elderly people, and preserving the environment.

They can also participate in Cal Poly's annual "Into the Streets" day of service, which takes place each fall, sprucing up facilities for groups such as Head Start, The AIDS Support Network, and the Homeless Shelter.

The Community Service Foundation

The Community Service Foundation offers mini-grants to qualified clubs and individuals to help them take on major projects. Any student club recognized by the university or any student performing a senior project with a service component is eligible to receive a grant. This year seven clubs involving approximately 100 members received mini-grants.

Service Recognition Awards

To acknowledge the importance of community service, Cal Poly gives annual president's awards to students, faculty, and community agency partners who help integrate education and community work. Students who



"Into the Streets": Nearly 100 students get ready for a day of service with a motto of "Try it for a day / You'll love it for a lifetime." (Photo courtesy Community Service Programs)

perform 120 or more hours of voluntary or academically related service can have their contributions noted on their university transcripts, and at spring commencement each of the six academic colleges recognizes one outstanding senior who exhibits a strong dedication to community service.

Beginning next spring, the McGowan-Schultz-Widic Community Service Scholarship will be awarded to an enrolled student with an outstanding record of service and commitment to continue service for at least one more year at Cal Poly. "Donations to provide additional scholarships would also be welcome," says Lutrin.

A Human Face

Every day **Shelley (Olsen) Parvin** slips into a t-shirt, jeans, and tennis shoes and spends the morning at Growing Grounds Farm and Nursery, sponsored in the San Luis Obispo countryside by Transitions-Mental Health Association. A Cal Poly horticulture student in the mid-1970s, Parvin is now participating in an American Association for Retired Persons re-training program. She is delighted to work with clients planting, harvesting, and repotting bright flowers and other seedlings that will be sent to retail nurseries. "This is good for me," she says, "and it's nice to help other people too."

Growing Grounds Farm Manager **Frank Ricceri (BUS '82)** sees the value of Cal Poly students' involvement extending far beyond simple production help. "When they work side by side with our clients, it gives us the opportunity to spread the

word that people with mental illness are no different than anyone else," he says. "Young minds can form a better notion about the nature of mental illness, and students can help break down its stigma."

"Cal Poly students are wonderful and absolutely critical to our operation," says Kathleen Richan, director of Friends Outside, which serves youth at the Juvenile Services Center and families of men incarcerated at the California Men's Colony. "Without their help, the number of people we serve would be cut nearly in half and the quality of our mentoring program would be greatly diminished."


"The Cal Poly community service/service-learning programs are a perfect 'win-win-win' for [our] services," agrees Michael Alan Morton, director of San Luis Obispo's Equal Opportunity Commission Homeless Services. "We are grateful to be one of your service sites. I honestly do not know who benefits the most — the students or us."

"What is most inspiring is that all our programs rest on the shoulders of student leaders," says Lutrin. "I am the only university staff person, working half time. Besides the logistics of helping students select their service placement and monitoring their work, student mentors in Class and Community Connections conduct 'reflection' meetings where students discuss their experiences and how they fit into coursework, ensuring that learning occurs. In Student Community Services, where student project leaders work an average of 10 hours per week, some must train



*Alums like **Loc Truong (EE '97)** have carried their interest in social work beyond graduation. Truong was honored by First Lady Hillary Clinton at January's State of the Union Address for his service with the AmeriCorps Program as a mentor to high-risk teenagers. Truong plans a career as a teacher and principal. (Photo courtesy of Loc Truong)*

90 volunteers, while others cope with great community needs (e.g., for the elderly) but minimal student involvement."

Finally, students who work in agency programs are often surprised by the power they have to make changes. Mechanical engineering sophomore Paulo Younse, director of Beyond Shelter, a program that works with the homeless, has gained a sense of purpose in his life. "I feel that I've developed myself," he explains. "There are people out there who need help, and my job is to bring them together with those who are able to help. Knowing I can do that, and knowing how many opportunities there are for college students, gives me a great sense of satisfaction." 

Cal Poly insiders keep outdoor school running

by Jaime Zuffoletto (JOUR '99)

Rancho El Chorro Outdoor School teaches that everything in nature depends on something else. And the school itself is no different. Located among the hills and valleys of the Central Coast, it depends on nearby Cal Poly students for daily maintenance and support.

When it first began more than 25 years ago, the program was developed out of a need for an outdoor educational facility for schoolchildren on the Central Coast. Now Rancho El Chorro Outdoor School's reputation precedes it. With the help of the only Central Coast marine biology lab available for schoolchildren, the school attracts young students from as far away as Yosemite and San Diego, and word of mouth continues to spread.

During the school's busiest time of year, up to 1,500 schoolchildren may attend its day programs each week, spending several hours exploring trails and spotting animals around the campus. The residential program, which usually draws around 90 children a week, lasts longer. Students spend three to five days participating in activities, discussing characteristics and traits of animals, and spotting birds, lizards, and snakes on various trails.

But it's what, or who, the students may not see that is helping to keep the school going — the Cal Poly student helpers.

"They're out of sight, but not out of mind," says Program Director Celeste Royer. "Our Cal Poly students are an important part of the program. They allow us to do our jobs, to teach the children and not have to worry about the maintenance of the animals."

In fact, Cal Poly students take care of almost 20 different species at the outdoor school and numerous others in the marine science

classroom at the Diablo Canyon Biology Lab. Students clean the cages and tanks of snakes, mice, sharks, and fish, feed the animals, and perform maintenance jobs around the 250-acre campus.

Last year PG&E, after many years of support, considered cutting its portion of funding for the lab completely. Royer and Cal Poly Biological Sciences Professor Mark Moline lobbied to keep it open. Now, instead of PG&E staffing the lab, Moline is responsible for overseeing Cal Poly students in its care and maintenance.

"Under the new deal, Cal Poly students staff the marine lab," says PG&E Biologist Sally Krenn. "They usually work about three days a week, a couple of hours a day. They make it possible for the children to see marine life in a clean and healthy environment." But it's not just the care the Cal Poly students give to the animals that makes them so invaluable to the program — it is also their willingness to help, whenever and wherever it is needed.

"Cal Poly students do some landscaping and custodial work, and some even work in our food service program," says Royer. "They see how food is prepared for a residential program and help with composting."

Royer calls the role of the Cal Poly student an apprenticeship. "They are learning so much because of the range of duties they have assigned to them. They learn about the employer-employee role and how to relate to other people. And they tailor what they contribute here into something they can use in their field, while bringing something new and exciting to the outdoor program.

"For example," says Royer, "we had a lot of kiosks and murals that were beginning to fade and needing some work. One of our Cal Poly helpers at the time happened to be majoring in art, so she contributed to our program in that way.

Harley, a red-tailed hawk, helps naturalist Christine Parks educate young students about birds of prey.

(Photo by Doug Allen)

