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# OVCS Newsletter February 2015

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# COMMUNITY LEARNING

## CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

### OVCS NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2015



## HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

*Neta Nakash '15*

**A**lthough I was only eleven at the time of Hurricane Katrina, I quickly became aware of the many people who lack proper shelter in the United States either due to natural disaster or the lack of affordable decent housing. I realized I wanted to dedicate my future to creating housing solutions for those in need, leading to my involvement with Habitat for Humanity. We are very fortunate at Connecticut College to have a very active Campus Chapter and local Eastern Connecticut affiliate. I joined the campus chapter in the fall of my freshman year participating in fundraisers and awareness events on campus and volunteering on builds in New London. For the past three years I have participated in Habitat for Humanity's Spring Break Collegiate Challenge, traveling with our campus chapter to Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida for weeklong builds. As a

senior and president of the Connecticut College Campus Chapter, I facilitate volunteer participation, organize fundraisers and awareness events, and plan the spring break trip that I am leading in March. I also had the fortunate opportunity to participate in a Habitat for Humanity Global Village Trip to Kona, Hawaii this January, led by Professor Cocores. Currently I am serving on the Board of Directors of Habitat for Humanity of Eastern Connecticut, where I continue to learn about the operations of a non-profit. In my experience with Habitat for Humanity I have been able to see various building practices and initiatives all over the United States, most recently participating in the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative in Waimea, Hawaii. Through my studies, internship experiences, and time with Habitat for Humanity, I have developed a passion for non-profit social

architecture and intend to pursue a master's of architecture with a strong interest in disaster relief design. I truly love the work that I have been doing with Habitat for Humanity over the past few years and am excited to be working as an AmeriCorps VISTA at Habitat for Humanity of East Bay/Silicon Valley beginning September 2015. The affiliate was recommended to me as strong program with positive initiatives, including the Greenpoint rating system, sustainable practices, and the renovation of homeless shelters. I am exciting to be going somewhere new and have the opportunity to be a part of such great initiatives! This opportunity was made possible by the generous support of Connecticut College, particularly Kimberly Sanchez, the Office of Volunteers for Community Service, and the Architectural Studies department.

## SURVEY WORK WITH THE NEW LONDON AREA FOOD PANTRY

*Tim Hartshorn '14*

With the new year comes new responsibilities for the New London Area Food Pantry. As always, Southeastern Connecticut residents eligible for the pantry's resources must be given access to food items promptly and efficiently – a task made possible by the pantry's dedicated volunteers, who recognize the importance of available and affordable food stocks during periods of harsh weather. In January, however, the pantry is tasked with a further assignment, namely, ensuring that those to whom it provides have confirmed their eligibility by participating in federal and state surveys. For many patrons of the pantry, especially those who must contend with language barriers and varying levels of familiarity with legislative terminology, the annual process of completing this documentation is made substantially more comfortable with the help of a second party. Over the course of January 2015, Connecticut College students and staff – through a partnership organized by OVCS – offered their time and linguistic abilities to providing such assistance. OVCS has a long-standing relationship with the food pantry, and the prospect of facilitating an essential function of this institution was met with great excitement by members of the college community. Largely because OVCS stresses the importance of clear and constructive interaction within social environments marked by ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, the project was a great success. OVCS representatives assisted numerous food pantry patrons with their annual paperwork, thus avoiding potential mix-ups which could, potentially, prove problematic for these individuals further down the road. The Spanish fluency of many college students and staff enabled the Spanish speakers to participate without fear of miscommunication.

As a staff member of OVCS, I had the opportunity to participate in this process on several occasions. The atmosphere of the food pantry was positive and encouraging; staff members and volunteers expressed great enthusiasm for their work, and patrons were cordial and extremely patient (during the busiest days, they were often required to wait). While none of this surprised me, it was incredibly encouraging to see yet another New London community organization function productively by virtue of a committed staff and gracious patrons – both of whom expressed their enthusiasm for collaborating with Connecticut College.

## Upcoming Events & Announcements

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International Children's  
Expo  
Partnership with  
Jennings Elementary School  
February 20, 2015

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As Told By Vaginas  
February 21, 2015  
2:00pm & 7:00pm  
Evans Hall

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Umoja Black History Month  
Dinner with Damien Jones  
February 22, 2015  
Cro 1941 room  
6:00pm

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Who Cares About Social  
Justice? Ethnography and  
Diversity Work  
March 2, 2015  
Cro 1941 room  
4:30pm-6:30pm

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United States Coast Guard  
Academy Ethics Forum  
March 19, 2015



## OVCS SPRING FELLOWSHIP

*Alysia Mattson '15*

In the summer of 2011, prior to taking an academic class at Connecticut College, I had already begun my journey with the Office of Volunteers for Community Service. As a first year, I did not realize the impact that the OVCS could have on my life. The mutually beneficial partnerships that the office has established with the local community is far-reaching with organizations ranging from schools, to theatres, food pantries, health organizations, and even an aquarium.

Working so closely with this office for the past 3.5 years has enhanced my liberal arts education by presenting me with the unique opportunity to gain valuable experiences within the community, create new connections, and contribute to New London.

This semester, I am grateful for the opportunity to extend my time

with the OVCS as their first-time Community Learning Fellow! Aside from continuing to promote community engagement, I most look forward to designing and



teaching a “math through dance” curriculum for the collaboration we have with the Expanded Learning Time program at Jennings Elementary School. It will be a challenging and innovative experience for me. I cannot wait to spend three days a week with an energetic, enthusiastic group of young minds.

If I had one piece of advice for my fellow Camels, it would be to get involved right away! The OVCS has long-established connections with a wide range of organizations in the local area. Too many students pass through their college careers without taking advantage of opportunities such as these. So come on into our office! We look forward to learning about your interests and finding a community site to extend your college experiences into the New London community.



# BLACK HISTORY MONTH KICK-OFF

Chris Dean '15

The Black History Month kick-off was a very fruitful event with music, dance, and powerful words of wisdom. The energy in the room was great and everyone took something away from the event that they could share with others. I know I really enjoyed Teleyah Sturvdant's '15 exceptional speech about how she has been able to understand her place as a scholar and activist. I also appreciated Professor Dunlap for bringing local youth in to this event so that they could see how Black History is celebrated at Connecticut College. The night was intriguing from Professor Collins' powerful dance to Keynote Speaker Attorney Lonnie Braxton who shared his riveting stories of growing up in Mississippi during the height of the civil rights movement. He not only sent a message to the youth in the room but also to today's college scholars who are vehicles of social change.

I am very thankful that Attorney Braxton agreed to be the key note speaker for the Black History Month kick-off. I knew that if anybody knew how we could talk about impact as a noun and not a verb it was Lonnie Braxton. I have been working with Attorney Braxton since early September 2014 and it has been a remarkable experience.

I can remember meeting with Attorney Braxton for the first time and his first response to me was "Where



does your family come from?" This question threw me off guard and surprisingly I did not know what particular part of Mississippi my great grand parents lived in or why they decided to migrate to Chicago. He continued to ask me why I thought he was asking me these questions. I responded by stating that if I did not know where my family comes from how can I truly understand who I am today. I left that day thinking that was one of the weirdest interviews I ever had or not even knowing if that had been an interview. We talked more about Mississippi than the accolades of my life. However, I appreciated that experience because he gave me the courage to call my great grandparents and ask questions and learn about their stories and see how they have shaped mine. I appreciate the mentorship Attorney Braxton

has given me because of these transformative experiences.

Attorney Braxton continues to challenge me to rethink my understanding of black history and acknowledge those untold pioneers that stood at the pillar advocating for civil rights and social progression. Attorney Braxton always tells me to never reinvent the wheel but perfect the wheel so that it can roll down to someone else. Through OVCS, I connected with Attorney Braxton and vital legal work. I only hope that in my life I can create a legacy similar to the one he has molded in the community he serves.



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