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5-2013

OVCS Newsletter May 2013

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Recommended Citation

Mattson, Alysia; Mehrhoff, Jessie; and Palatino,, Brigi, "OVCS Newsletter May 2013" (2013). *Community Partnerships Newsletters*. 19.
<https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/cpnews/19>

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COMMUNITY LEARNING

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

OVCS NEWSLETTER

May 2013

只要读书 世界就是你的 --

Read and the World is Yours

by Alysia Mattson '15

Summer for me has always been a time to stay close to home, be with friends, reunite with the family, and have a job. However, as the end of this school year approaches, I cannot help but feel nervous. I will be spending 6 months of the year in China with CET's Intensive Chinese Language program. Here at Connecticut College, I have grown to love every aspect of Chinese: the artistic characters, their etymology, tone inflections, and stroke orders. I am currently completing my fourth semester of Chinese here at Conn with non other than the language guru, Professor King.

The OVCS has further allowed me to share my passion with local middle students through the ENRICH Program. Teaching Chinese bi-weekly to such energetic students and exposing them to a culture and language that they have no access to at school was beyond rewarding. One goal of ENRICH is to provide opportunities to middle school students to better enhance their understanding of what the college liberal arts experience is all about. Through workshops such as my Chinese class and other classes including, Arabic, song writing, sustainability, and dance, these students worked closely with college mentors to advance their knowledge in a specific area. I really enjoyed designing interactive, age-appropriate programs such as card games to teach numbers, stories to help them learn animals, cross word puzzles to expose them to Chinese foods, and videos of cultural practices.

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Chinese Characters meaning "establishing friendships"

只要读书 世界就是你的 -- Read and the World is Yours (cont.)



I still see these children, even a month after having taught the Chinese language workshop. They automatically greet me in Chinese and proudly say other phrases that they have retained. The teachers from the Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School say that the students use Chinese words in their own school hallways. I love knowing that they are using their newly acquired skills on a daily basis outside of the classroom! It shows that these kids were actively engaged in the workshops and retained much of what they were taught. Having the opportunity to be exposed to various cultures and languages is so valuable and I know the young

students appreciate this after school program that the Program Leaders, Mentors, and OVCS Staff have organized for them.

I cannot wait to bring back more advanced Chinese language skills as well as cultural knowledge from my time abroad in China. Two months in Harbin and four months in Beijing will truly broaden my cultural perspective. I am most nervous for signing the language pledge where I must vow to only speak Chinese, but am beyond excited to be eating authentic Chinese food on a daily basis!

ENRICH Visits City Hall

by Jessie Mehrhoff '14

On April 22nd, 2013, sixty students from Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School in New London, Connecticut rode their afternoon school bus to the New London City Hall. The students were greeted by their mentors from Connecticut College's ENRICH after school program who also rode a yellow school bus from campus to City Hall. ENRICH, established during the 2013 spring semester, is a collaborative effort that pairs sixth grade students from Bennie Dover Jackson Middle school with Connecticut College student mentors. The Holleran Center PICA scholars taught iCivics within the program. This trip aimed to further foster a relationship between the students and their local government. Students rushed to their mentors on

the steps of City Hall, eagerly waiting to enter the building. This was the first time that many of the students were visiting their City Hall.

Students and their mentors filed into the benches where City Council meets as the Mayor, Daryl Justin Finizio, and Deputy Fire Chief Kydd gazed at the full room of local youth. Once everyone was settled, the two New London leaders began their presentation. Mayor Finizio welcomed the students to the City Council's meeting space and introduced Chief Kydd. Chief Kydd immediately connected with the students by telling them that he too grew up in New London. He discussed how growing up in New London encouraged him to work hard to

ENRICH Visits City Hall (cont.)



protect and preserve his city and the importance of having pride in one's town. The interactive presentation questioned students' knowledge of the roles of a Fire Chief. He shared fascinating stories of times when he helped save the lives of various citizens from New London and the students attentively listened to him and enthusiastically raised their hands to respond to his questions.

Mayor Finizio then took center stage and discussed his role as the New London Mayor. He provided students with a brief history of the New London government, starting with his election as the Mayor and the accompanying transformation of the local politics. Mayor Finizio had the students sitting on the edge of their seats as he discussed some of the important roles of a Mayor. He told them dramatic stories regarding the transport of citizens from New London's emergency shelter during Hurricane Sandy. The audience smiled as they heard the heroic ending; the Mayor's quick and educated decision had kept everyone safe! The remainder of the Mayor's presentation was used to urge students to let their voices be heard in local government. He stressed the need for students to educate themselves and their families about the importance of voting. Mayor Finizio concluded by inviting students to

future City Council meetings so that their concerns about their school and community could be addressed.

The discussion was then changed to an open forum, causing the Mayor and Fire Chief to be flooded with the students' questions. One student asked about the City of New London's hiring process, while another asked about the significance of various paintings displayed around the room. Many students expressed a sense of satisfaction in learning that the New London officials wanted to hear what they had to say. It was evident that the Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School students had developed a sense of empowerment thanks to these city officials.

Meeting outside City Hall before catching the bus to return to Connecticut College, the students expressed excitement about all they had just learned. Some of the students still had questions for the Mayor and Fire Chief, while others were just eager to discuss their experience of meeting their city officials. The thirty college student mentors that had attended the event spent the ride back expressing a great admiration for the behavior, questions, and responses of our encouraged mentees.

AmeriCorps: Strengthening Communities

by Brigi Palatino, AmeriCorps*VISTA



During my undergraduate years at Connecticut College, I was deeply involved in the Office of Volunteers for Community Service (OVCS) as a community site driver and coordinator for the Kids, Books, & Athletics (KBA) program. The community site driver position allowed me to explore the New London community as well as gain an understanding of the ample volunteer, work-study, and service learning opportunities that the surrounding community has to offer. In addition, the KBA program combined my passion for working with youth and my love of athletics.

If you flashback one year ago, I was a senior in college uncertain what direction life would take me upon graduating Conn. Despite my uncertainty at the time, I knew without question that I will always be a Camel at heart and New London will always be my second home. Due to my positive experience working with a welcoming, caring, and supportive staff from OVCS as well as my excitement to foster a campus-wide culture of engagement, the AmeriCorps position was very fitting.

As an AmeriCorps VISTA and a member of the OVCS team, there is never a dull moment. From the start of the academic year, OVCS collaborated with the orientation committee and the Residential Education and Living (REAL) department to implement a new freshman orientation initiative.

This initiative was Connecticut College's first ever freshman Orientation Community Learning Event in which the entire freshmen class – over 500 students – traveled to one of ten community sites for a day of community engagement. This collaboration is one of many examples how OVCS continues to build upon existing relationships to put the College's mission of educating students to put the liberal arts into action as citizens in a global society.

Most notable during the spring semester was the coexistence of three mentor programs. Due to the success of the SISTER and REACH mentor programs, OVCS was invited to expand New London Public Schools collaborations to create the Enrich pilot program. Secondly, the KBA program served approximately 180 youth and children of New London to foster a love of learning, promote physical fitness, and encourage healthy living habits. Personally, working directly with the youth in the mentor programs and KBA has been one of the most memorable experiences of my VISTA year. In addition to the positive impact AmeriCorps has on the College and New London Community, the AmeriCorps position has fostered my development and growth as a person and as a professional. I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to continue my involvement with OVCS as an AmeriCorps VISTA.

Community Learning is published by the Connecticut College Office of Volunteers for Community Service

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