

Engaging Students through Service-Learning **SPRING 2010 UPDATE**

CSUCL increases service-learning initiatives to reach 135 college students

Building on its successful Fall semester of engaged scholarship initiatives, the Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership (CSUCL) has placed additional college students into internship, academic, and work-study opportunities for the Spring 2010 semester, bringing its annual total to 135 service-learning placements.

Developing opportunities for partnership between Rutgers-Camden and the community has always been at the forefront of the CSUCL's mission, but in light of the university's new emphasis on civic engagement with Camden City, the history and success of the Center's work is all the more meaningful. Each semester the CSUCL has increased its number of service-learning placements and continues to employ the largest number of student interns on the Rutgers-Camden campus.

Through the Center's diverse portfolio of programs, these college students are placed in professional settings at LEAP Academy University Charter School that offer valuable firsthand experience, bringing their academic work in the classroom into actual practice for the benefit of all of those involved.

Once again this semi-annual update offers a few examples of the many ways that students and the community at large are benefitting from these applied-learning experiences. Some highlights from this semester include the ongoing placements of Rutgers students from the School of Nursing, successful service projects from the Center's urban practicum course, and new student volunteer opportunities through the ASPIRE mentoring initiative.

Each year, the CSUCL has advanced its mission of Engaged Scholarship by increasing the number of students placed at LEAP. At the end of the day, the success of these programs creates a win-win relationship and makes a positive and lasting impact on college students and children in the city.

2009-10 SERVICE PLACEMENTS

- **1 GRADUATE EDUCATION FELLOWS**
- **2 DOCTORAL FELLOWS**
- **2 UNDNJ MEDICAL RESIDENTS**
- **4 BACHELOR'S IN SOCIAL WORK FIELD PLACEMENTS**
- **5 MASTER'S IN SOCIAL WORK FIELD PLACEMENTS**
- **11 WORK-STUDY PLACEMENTS**
- **13 BACHELOR'S IN NURSING STUDENTS**
- **16 STUDENTS IN SERVICE-LEARNING COURSES**
- **30 UMDNJ MEDICAL STUDENT PLACEMENTS**
- **50 JUMPSTART/WORK-STUDY/AMERICORPS**
- 135 TOTAL SERVICE-LEARNING PLACEMENTS**

Rutgers Nursing students complete rotations at CSUCL's Health Center

The Center's partnership with the Rutgers-Camden School of Nursing has continued this semester, as 13 nursing students are completing part of their clinical field rotations through placements at the Rutgers/LEAP Health Center at LEAP Academy in Camden.

These 13 students are part of an ongoing rotation of nursing students since September 2009 who have completed a two-day placement at LEAP Academy under the supervision of the school's registered nurse.

Rutgers-Camden senior Danielle Brown completed her two-day rotation in early March and said the experience was very positive. "It's been really good. It's been the best rotation I've ever had," said Danielle, who will graduate in May with a Bachelor's in Nursing.

Splitting time between LEAP Elementary (K-6) and High schools (7-12), Danielle took the lead on providing student care like hearing and vision screenings and all of the everyday duties she would perform as an actual school nurse.

"I was interested in learning more about how school nursing worked," said Danielle, despite the fact she hopes to follow a career in adult nursing at a hospital like Cooper University Hospital. "[The

Rutgers School of Nursing] wants us to see all of our options. So even though it's not what I'm planning to go into I was really glad the option was provided."

The placement at the CSUCL's Health Center is one part of the students' required community clinical rotations; other placements have included Cooper Hospital, Hospice, and other medical agencies in the area.

Jen Bacui, another senior in the Rutgers-Camden School of Nursing, was placed at LEAP and said the placement is giving her nursing experience outside a hospital. "I like it," Jen said, emphasizing the autonomy of the profession. "I like working more independently. It's a lot different; there are more everyday situations than in a hospital setting."

During her time at Rutgers she has learned about school nursing duties like vision screenings and other school nursing duties, but until now she had never actually performed any. "I didn't know how in-depth it really was," she said, referring to the position requirements of a Master's degree and nursing certification. "It's teaching us (nursing students) the basics. That way we



can become more specialized in what we do, and that's important."

Jen is a former pre-med student but made the switch to nursing because it was a better fit for her. "I'm glad I did, I like [nursing] a lot. It's more about patient care. Doctors treat the disease but for nurses it's the whole person."

During their placements the students also help organize CSUCL events like "Go Red For Women" day on February 5th; the event was part of a national effort to raise awareness and prevention for heart disease and stroke in women. Supervised by a resident physician from Cooper Hospital, the nursing students helped perform free blood pressure screenings for nearly 100 students and over 25 staff members at LEAP Academy.

Rutgers volunteers helping high school students to ASPIRE

In addition to academic credit, work-study, and internship placements, the CSUCL offers a range of volunteer opportunities for college students in Camden to invest in the success of the city's youth. Its newest initiative, ASPIRE, is an innovative student mentoring program designed to give urban youth the support they need to transition successfully into high school.

Nearly a dozen students from Rutgers-Camden have volunteered to serve as mentors for the program and are working individually with freshman from LEAP Academy Charter School. Through individual and group social activities, these mentors are offering students a positive role model and helping them to develop academically and socially as they begin high school.

Pam Sheppard, a Rutgers undergraduate working towards her Bachelor's in Social Work, is volunteering as a mentor this semester. "A lot of kids in the city need someone to look up to, someone to talk to other than their parents," said Pam, who will graduate in 2012. "It's about doing something positive and getting them on the right track, because they only have a few years before adulthood."

Pam and other mentors have individual sessions with their mentee and also devote time to reach out to parents, teachers, and administrators in order to collaborate in the student's overall success. "Many students do not perceive how important their education is. They're not looking ahead or sometimes their peers hold them back," she said, but believes that mentoring can help.



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The program is funded by a grant from the AT&T Foundation and partners with Check & Connect, a national dropout prevention model developed by the University of Minnesota. Using this model, ASPIRE mentors work with school administrators to identify children who need support and get them the tutoring, counseling, or health services they need to preempt any of the common factors that inevitably lead to drop outs. Pam, who is a grandmother of three, does not view her age difference with the students as a problem; in fact, she thinks it may help her better relate to them. "Many kids have questions about college, about life, and I have the life experience to help them," she said. "I don't want it to be about me being an 'adult' or a 'grandmother' either. I just want to be human—someone who's there for them and they can talk to."

So far this semester, ASPIRE has arranged a roller skating party and field trips to area museums.

With several more events being planned, Pam said there is plenty of time for new Rutgers students to volunteer and help encourage positive youth development. "It's not all about books, it's about life and if you can combine both like in this program, that's dynamite."

For information on how you can become an ASPIRE mentor and help every LEAP child graduate high school and have an opportunity for college and career success, please contact Jade Edwards at jadee@camden.rutgers.edu or (856) 225-2871. Become a mentor today!

Urban Practicum lets Rutgers student develop youth leadership, and his own

Civic leadership development is an ongoing focus at the CSUCL and each semester it supervises two college courses at Rutgers-Camden with the Department of Urban Studies that emphasize this issue. The first course is an Experiential Learning seminar that engages Rutgers students in research on civic issues in the community and requires them to develop a service project that offers a solution to an actual problem.

A second course, meanwhile, is a structured Urban Studies field practicum in which students integrate their own practice interests into an independent social service project. The course is based at LEAP Academy Charter School in Camden and for three hours each week students work on-site to develop and institute their projects.

As part of the practicum, Rutgers senior Sean Brown has focused his attention on building leadership capacity for urban youth and is working with student leaders at LEAP Academy High school. Sean has become the advisor for LEAP's SGA and has instituted changes to the student government structure.

"Working with politics at the youngest level has been interesting for me. It's been a really unique experience," said Sean, who also serves as Vice President of the Rutgers-Camden student government.

Among the changes, Sean has begun holding regular monthly meetings that convene all student leaders at one time, bringing the SGA officers together with all individual class officers from grades 9-12 to provide a more comprehensive perspective on student issues. These changes have been codified in a new student government "constitution" that will continue this new policy in future school years.

The most significant change through his work has been the creation of a student representative position on the LEAP Academy Board of Trustees. Through this position, an elected student will participate in the school's bi-monthly Board meetings as an

ex-officio (non-voting) member and have the opportunity to raise issues on behalf of the student body. "It's a system to allow student concerns to be discussed and vetted by the Board. I think it can be an example for other charters and public schools," he said.

Sean explained that he has often had to act as a political advisor to some of LEAP's student leaders but that it is important to provide guidance to them as they mature in their leadership roles. "Issues in urban communities are critical. If [students] can get experience in their youth then they will be better prepared to deal with issues when they become professionals. It doesn't matter if you're President Obama or president of your class," he said, you still have to know how to navigate the politics of each setting.

Meanwhile, Sean is in his final undergraduate semester at Rutgers-Camden and will graduate in May. He plans to pursue graduate studies either in Rutgers' Master's in Public Administration (MPA) program or the University of Delaware's Master's in Public Policy (MPP) program and hopes to take what he's learned in the urban practicum with him.

"There's no better way to be refreshed at your job than to meet and work with students. It's a really unique experience that most professionals don't have," Sean said. "The real world work experience, attached to my studies, it's been really helpful for me as a student."

Each semester we will highlight the stories of Rutgers students who are making a difference while also learning. Faculty and students interested in placements at LEAP or in developing courses that integrate applied learning, please contact the CSUCL's Associate Director Wanda Garcia at (856) 225-6348 or wandag@camden.rutgers.edu