

Engaging Students through Service-Learning FALL UPDATE 2009

RUTGERS STUDENTS ENGAGED IN SERVICE-LEARNING PLACEMENTS THROUGH CSUCL

Service-Learning is at the core of the Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership's work. As a university-based center, we strive to provide our students with opportunities that allow them to see the connections between classroom theory and field practice, while also contributing to their own commitment to civic service.

Each academic term, the Center engages students in applied-learning through numerous efforts like fellowships, internships, field practice, practicums, and work-study, which are tied into the student's academic pursuits. These opportunities not only enrich the students' college experiences but also benefit the community surrounding Rutgers.

Collaborating with a number of academic departments, the Career Placement Office, the Office of Financial Aid, and other students support units on campus, we have achieved record placements for the second consecutive year, as 131 college students in Camden City have been placed in professional settings at LEAP Academy University Charter School. The highlights of this year's efforts are:

- *Experiential Learning and Urban Practicum courses (20 Rutgers-Camden students)*
- *Jumpstart Early Literacy Program (50 Rutgers-Camden undergraduates)*
- *HOP medical clinic for the uninsured (30 third-year UMDNJ medical students)*
- *Social Work Field Practice Students (6 Graduate, 3 undergraduate Rutgers-Camden students)*
- *Rutgers/LEAP Centers of Excellence (22 Rutgers-Camden students)*

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.

NEW RUTGERS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING COURSE TAKES AIM AT SOCIAL ILLS IN CAMDEN

This semester, a new course developed by the CSUCL and the Department of Urban Studies is providing a dozen Rutgers students with the chance to conduct applied research and develop service projects that explicitly address public issues in Camden City.

The Experiential Learning and Community Leadership Service-Learning Seminar is a combined graduate and undergraduate course that exposes students to social problems facing Camden and allows them to discuss, research, and propose community-wide solutions.

"It's a totally different learning experience," said Andrew Ewell, a junior Urban Studies major. "We're interacting with lessons and conducting research outside the classroom."

Students are speaking to Camden stakeholders, touring the city, speaking to residents, and will create projects that focus on one of three community research areas: Education, Health & Human Services, and Environmental Protection. The course is being taught by Professor of Public Administration Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Urban Studies professor Dr. Russell Harrison, and co-instructor Tatiana Poladko Alleyne.

"This unique course will promote learning and community leadership development while advancing the university's mission of community development and revitalization," said Dr. Santiago.

Once completed, student research will be adapted into civic projects in Camden that will seek to benefit residents of the city.

"It's gratifying to me because this project can change people's lives," said Urban Studies senior Laura Jakimowicz, whose team is working on an Environmental project for Cramer Hill.

"I'm interested in developing something that can actually be put into practice, not just a school project," added senior

Stephanie Brientnall, an Urban Studies major set to graduate in May 2010. Stephanie is the team leader for the Education group and her project involves creating a holistic education approach for children from birth to 18 years old that she hopes will be adopted by public schools in the city.

Umbrella services like LEAP's Health Center, Pre College Office, Law Clinic, and others "Are not offered in public schools," Stephanie said. "They can help a lot, to improve attendance and performance and help students focus on school."

In September, students went on a tour of North Camden that included several public schools, where they saw the lack of resources like no cafeterias or playgrounds, which forces some to have recess in the hallways. "It was very eye-opening to see parts of some schools boarded up, with wires around the school, but still in session," said Vanessa Koch, a junior Political Science major. "How is that a positive environment for students to learn in?"

"There is a more personal aspect for me," said Vanessa, who has a daughter in preschool getting ready to enter the public school system. "It puts a lot into perspective. This made me ask, 'What do I want, and not want, for her?'"

The experiential learning aspect of the course is unique, students say, and is teaching them great skills for future careers in community organizing, urban planning, and public policy. "This is a great opportunity to get hands-on experience and to build a skill set," said Laura.

By actively engaging in the community, students are also gaining a new perspective on the city. "I feel so empowered to go out and make a difference and learn more about Camden," Vanessa said. "You don't get that in a regular class."

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC URBAN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP



Students in the CSUCL's new Urban Studies course meet with community stakeholders in Cramer Hill

2009-10 SERVICE PLACEMENTS

- 2 DOCTORAL FELLOWS
- 4 GRADUATE EDUCATION FELLOWS
- 3 BACHELOR'S IN SOCIAL WORK FIELD PRACTICE PLACEMENTS
- 6 MASTER'S IN SOCIAL WORK FIELD PRACTICE PLACEMENTS
- 16 WORK-STUDY PLACEMENTS
- 20 STUDENTS STUDYING IN SERVICE-LEARNING COURSES
- 30 UMDNJ MEDICAL STUDENT PLACEMENTS
- 50 JUMPSTART/WORK STUDY/AMERICORPS PLACEMENTS
- 131 TOTAL SERVICE-LEARNING PLACEMENTS

MPA - EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP STUDENT TEACHING LITERACY AROUND THE GLOBE

Working overseas in Malawi and Lithuania through the Peace Corps for five and a half years taught Rutgers graduate student Jake Wilson that he had a lot to offer people in need. In his time abroad, he helped Lithuanian students learn English, taught people in Malawi about natural resource management and gender equality, and even helped build a two-room school house for children in Malawi.

But, Jake said, "It does no good to build a building without filling it with good people."

In order to do just that when he returns to Malawi someday, Jake has enrolled in Rutgers-Camden's MPA-Educational Policy & Leadership Concentration (EPLC) to learn more about education and how to run a school.

"I'm here to develop my teaching skills. I have a passion for community and international development, but I don't know enough about it right now," said Jake, who is earning an MPA-EPLC degree through a LEAP Education Fellowship. The fellowship is for returning Peace Corps members and provides Jake with tuition support and salary and housing stipends. In exchange, Jake works 30 hours per week at LEAP Academy, where he works with second and third grade students on literacy and language arts.

"It's teaching me a lot. I'm learning every day," Jake said. Each day he conducts guided reading groups and writing lessons with children. He said when he teaches a lesson then has students try it themselves and 50 to 60 percent understand it on their own, "It's really rewarding."

Meanwhile, his classes and experience at LEAP are teaching him about important school business like finances, partnerships, laws, curricula, and public budgeting. His work at LEAP also emphasizes continuous learning, because "Teachers are learners too."

Once he completes the two-year MPA program, Jake plans to take the skills he learned back to Malawi and start a secondary school for young women. "There's a need for female education," he said, and explained that because parents in Malawi must pay for secondary school, they are more apt to send one child, traditionally sons. "There is a real imbalance in gender equality."

"A pillar of the community is an effective school. They are deciding today where kids will be in 10 or 15 years," Jake said. "If I can learn how to run a school I can help the community and be effective."



Jake Wilson (far right) participates in a guided reading group with third grade students at LEAP Academy

SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS LEAD SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

This semester, CSUCL Associate Director Wanda Garcia is supervising the field placements of nine students in the School of Social Work at Rutgers-Camden. All nine of the students are placed at LEAP Academy where they work with the Rutgers/LEAP Family Support Center, a health and human services program that provides emotional and behavioral support to children and families at the school.

First-year graduate student Lauren Cleary is working on the development of the Rutgers/LEAP Aspire program, which mentors students in ninth grade to ensure they have the proper support to transition successfully into high school. "It's giving me access to really great people and an experienced work environment. You won't get that at a lot of other places," Lauren said.

Her work at the Center is part of her MSW field placement, which requires her to work 15 hours per week in a social services setting. "It's really important to get into the field because social work is so hands-on," Lauren said. "This gives me a larger perspective of what's going on in Camden, and that's important."

By her second year Lauren will have to choose a concentration for her MSW, and her involvement in Aspire's planning stages will help her choose. "I'm excited to see how the process works. This experience will help me make my decision."

Meanwhile, MSW students Latoya Gaines and Grace Commiso are supervising a character education program for seventh grade girls called "Dare to be Rare." The program was developed for LEAP by a former Rutgers Social Work student last year and has proven successful.

"It develops social skills and teaches students how to interact with other students," said Grace, who hopes to work in marriage and family counseling. "This placement is ideal because it's preparing me to work with youth."

Latoya added that the transition to high school for female students is especially difficult and the program "Offers a space where they can come and talk to other girls who are facing the same issues." Latoya is planning to work on policy and grant-writing in Non-Profit Public Management rather than direct counseling, but "Even that position is involved with families and needs to work with children," she said.

UNDERGRADS JUMPSTART EARLY LITERACY IN CAMDEN CITY

Through the CSUCL's Jumpstart program, 50 Rutgers undergraduate students are earning academic credit and work-study money this year by working with preschool children in Camden City.

Now in its second year of one-on-one early literacy mentoring, Rutgers Jumpstart is continuing its work to improve early childhood learning in Camden City while providing valuable, firsthand teaching experience to work-study and volunteer students at Rutgers-Camden.

Rutgers senior Courtney Neckonchuck is in her second year with the program. "It's definitely helped me get experience in classrooms with kids and with my peers; that has been the biggest plus," said Courtney, who will earn her B.A. in English in May 2010.

As a Jumpstart team leader who supervises nine other Rutgers students in the program, Courtney is gaining leadership experience that she thinks will better prepare her for a career in education. "I'm definitely more comfortable being around students and teachers and I feel like I have a 'one-up' on everyone with that extra year of experience," Courtney said.

"I've always wanted to be a teacher, but actually being in classrooms now, I know for sure that this is something I want to do," said Krystl Johnson, a senior English and African American Studies major. Krystl plans to graduate in May and said her work with students in Jumpstart is giving her in-class experience for a job as a speech pathologist or reading specialist. "We're practicing what we're going to do every day; you can't learn that from a book no matter how good the author is," Krystl said.

Krystl and Courtney also participated in Jumpstart's Read for the Record campaign on October 8, which was an international effort to read to one million children in a single day. At Rutgers, 65 university and community members volunteered to read Eric Carl's "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" to 200 preschoolers at LEAP and at a Respond Inc. preschool classroom in the city.