

COMMUNITY UCONNECTIONS

Office of Community Outreach, University of Connecticut

August Training Kicks Off Exciting Year

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The 2007-2008 Community Outreach student leader who attended August training.

by Heather Williams
Business '09

What a week! The Community Outreach professional staff put on an exciting week filled with speakers, community building, and service opportunities. While the main goal was to train the new program directors, coordinators, and managers in the administrative tasks and responsibilities of their positions, the staff also managed to include several fun activi-

ties. Participants engaged in team building activities, bowling, and a trip to Willington Pizza House to name a few.

For the sixty student leaders who participated, the week was about much more than simply moving in early. The days were filled with workshops on policy, procedure, and methods for recruitment, training, and communicating. The days were long, yet informative. While the students were educated,

they were also given a chance to interact and network with their fellow leaders.

The week opened Monday night with guest speaker Marc Mercadante, a Regional Director for the Special Olympics. He shared his thoughts on service and the importance of volunteering by sharing family experiences. Kevin Sullivan, Assistant Director of First Year Programs, followed

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Community Outreach — Still On the Move

by Matt Farley
*Assistant Director for
Community Outreach*

What happens when 1,300 students decide to make a difference in the lives of others? Over 23,000 hours of

service to 80 community based organizations in over 45 communities during the 2006-2007 academic year; that's what!

Students' interest and commitment to service is strong and it's showing. They are engaging in a larger num-

bers (almost 12% increases from Academic Year 05-06), and they are contributing more time individually and collectively to the community. Individual students this past year invested

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Call for Action,

a weekly email bulletin, provides information on new service opportunities and related events occurring in the greater Storrs community.

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A Student Reflection on an Eye Opening Experience

by Melissa Czajkowski
Nursing '10

Last May, a group of fifteen UConn students, accompanied by student leader Devika Dhandapani and Sociology Professor Kathryn Strother Ratcliff, spent three weeks in the Dominican Republic as part of a Sociology 296. Their mission was to educate impoverished Haitian immigrants living in bateys (sugar cane villages) in the city of San Pedro. The students were hoping to learn more about Dominican life and culture along the way. What they actually accomplished was much more than that.

Before their departure, the group met five times to prepare for the trip, creating lesson plans and enriching their knowledge of Dominican social and political history. After arriving in the Dominican, the group lived in Casa Pastoral, a church-affiliated dormitory in the city of La Romana. The dorm had one bathroom for all of its residents, which totaled, at one point in the week, about 25 people. Though the lack of air conditioning and occasional bat or bug problem made the accommodations uncomfortable at times, the students were not at a loss for hospitality and care.

The group quickly learned that despite the fact that the Dominican and the U.S. are in the same time zone, time passes more slowly for the Dominicans. Dominicans escape the traditional American fast-paced attitude, and instead adopt a philosophy that takes time



Marybeth Fafalla poses with new friends

out for talking with friends and family, as well as creating networks and relationships. Though initially this was quite the adjustment for most of the group, soon they settled in and enjoyed their leisurely, however purposeful, pace.

In the first week, the group visited five bateys and held health education workshops. With the help of translators fluent in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole, the groups presented information on nutrition and HIV. Each batey was dis-

tinct and they all showed a level of poverty incomparable to anything anyone on the trip had ever witnessed before.

In the bateys, workers and their families live in one-room homes supplied by the sugar company. The rooms are often no larger than 10 feet by 10 feet and are made of concrete or aluminum sheets. In most bateys, there is no electricity or running water. There is no easy access to transportation, so the inhabitants are isolated. Most bateys have no school and no medical care. There is rampant hunger and malnutrition -- a serving of beans and rice are often all that people ate in a day. Their clothes are mostly donated and very worn, and most of the kids do not wear shoes. Though the sugar companies own the land and have the power to improve the conditions of the batey, they do nothing. In fact, they prevent the families from growing their own gardens to force them to purchase food from company-owned markets.

The men on the batey work cutting sugar cane, 12 hours a day and 6 days a week. It is backbreaking work, most often done in the sweltering heat with little or no breaks. On average, they earn about \$2.50 per day.

In the second full week of the trip, the

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Service Projects Highlight Thursday Training



Kevin Mabry and Gina DeVivo-Brassaw prepare food at the soup kitchen.

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up Tuesday morning with his findings of personality types. He examined how personalities can differ four ways; energy, perception, judgment, and lifestyle. The Community Outreach leaders tested their own personality types and learned how certain personality types are more likely to get along than others. The final

guest speaker was Dr. Christine Wilson, Director of Student Activities. She examined cultural competency and the importance of understanding differences among cultures. Her lecture was enthralling and eye-opening.

On Thursday, every Community Outreach leader was involved in a service project in the local community. Students were broken up into groups based on their program type and were sent to Willimantic Public Library, Holy Family Shelter, North Windham Elementary School, Oak Grove Montessori School and Covenant Soup Kitchen. While some of the tasks were more interesting than others, everyone admitted to learning something about giving back to the surrounding community.

However, the most important lesson learned during the week of training was teambuilding. Exercises were done daily to improve the concept of "team" and to give each program director, manager, and coordinator ideas on how to improve their own "team" or Community of Practice once they start their program.

Overall, the week was a success. The Professional Staff incorporated fun activities while still educating directors, coordinators, and managers in all aspects of volunteering. It will be an exciting fall semester and we look forward to getting out into the community and applying our new knowledge.

A New Meaningful Opportunity Offered to Jumpstart Learning

by Rama Yalamanchili
CLAS '10

The University of Connecticut and the Office of Community Outreach have established a new partnership with Jumpstart they are thrilled to offer to the undergraduate student body. This is an extraordinary opportunity for students to interact with preschool aged children of low income backgrounds by assisting in the development of literacy and school readiness skills. This is achieved through one on one interaction between college students and young children. Jumpstart is an exciting chance for college students to make a huge, long lasting difference in the life of a young child.

Research supports the need for programs such as Jumpstart. Studies show that literacy rates of children from low income backgrounds continuously lag behind those of their suburban peers. In particular, the *Perry-Scope study* conducted by the High Scope Research Foundation shows that cognitive scores are higher for those who participate in an early intervention program. These courses are essential in urban locales,

since there are many young children who continue to fall through the gaps that exist within our education system. Jumpstart is one of the programs that can help to bridge the gap.

Jumpstart is a national non-profit organization that hires and trains college students to work one on one with preschool students. The object is to develop literacy skills in the surrounding community. The program is funded by

"This is a dynamic opportunity which offers students interactions with many different groups"

- Colleen Deasy,

Program Director, Jumpstart

Americorps, which is a "network of local, state, and national service programs that connects more than 70,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet our country's critical needs", according to the Americorps website.

Students commit to a term of 300 service hours and are eligible to win a \$1,000 grant at the completion of these hours. In addition, most of Jumpstart's



One on one interactions are commonplace in the Jumpstart setting.

volunteers earn work study.

The program will be led by student coordinator Colleen Deasy, who describes Jumpstart as "a dynamic opportunity which offers students interactions with many different groups ranging from working with teachers to interacting with pre-school students and their families on a one-on-one basis". New staff member Megan Marshall will also be focusing on the program.

Jumpstart is looking for qualified enthusiastic students to fill its positions, and there are still leadership opportunities available. If you are interested in finding more information about this program, please visit www.jumpstart.uconn.edu.

Student Involvement on the Rise

(cont'd from page 1)

20% more time than their peers in 2003-04. Cumulatively students have increased their hours invested in Community Outreach initiatives by over 98% since 2003-04.

There are a couple of trends that we're examining closely in Community Outreach that we look forward to capitalizing on this year including, but not limited to:

- ✦ The University's focus on developing global citizens
- ✦ Community Outreach's ability to develop more complex relationships with agencies that allow students multiple ways to serve & learn with a given agency

✦ Faculty's interest in developing academic service-learning experiences where community service is integrated into an academic class or program



✦ The continued growth in the immersion experiences with a special focus on international service-learning

✦ Partnering with external funders to develop programs and make linkages to national service programs like Americorps

I anticipate that this year will again be an exciting year for Community Outreach. I also expect that our publication of *UConnConnections* will continue to keep you informed about our work, explore the critical issues we are facing, and celebrate the accomplishments of our students and community partners.

On behalf of my colleagues in Community Outreach, I wish you an outstanding 2007-08 academic year.

UConn Students Journey to the Dominican Republic

(cont'd from page 2)

group taught English at a primary school in San Pedro. They worked in groups of two and three and taught simple English to classes of 20-40 students, even though some only spoke Spanish conversationally. Each class day was about three hours. The task was made more difficult due to overcrowding, and the general misbehavior of the younger students. The group quickly learned that many Dominican children may never receive a formal education because the government refuses to issue them a legal birth certificate or simply because they cannot afford the required uniform.

It is important to note that the poverty in the Dominican is more of a problem for Haitian immigrants, who are subject to racial discrimination from the government and some Dominican citizens. The government makes it nearly impossible for any Haitian immigrant or descendant to obtain citizenship, taking away the key to the betterment of their lives.

When the group was not on a batey or at the school, they could be found journeying to various cultural and educational sites. They visited an HIV clinic that was working to end the discrimination against pregnant women with HIV/AIDS and toured a public hospital, including the emergency room, the operating rooms, and the x-ray rooms. The group also visited

Santo Domingo to see the monument dedicated to the Mirabel sisters, who were martyred when they opposed the fascist government under President Raphael Trujillo. Also in Santo Domingo, the group saw the Christopher Columbus Lighthouse, a controversial monument that cost tens of millions of dollars.

The cultural differences were obvious when the group returned to the US. In the Dominican, friendly greetings from strangers are customary, and spontaneous dance parties on long bus rides to a work site were ordinary occurrences. The journey to class is far more impartial. The time the UConn group spent in



Two Dominican children take time to stop for a picture

the Dominican taught them much about the controversial issues of racism and poverty still existing in the country today. The experiences in the Dominican instilled a sense of responsibility and a desire to advocate for rampant suffering and human rights violations. With their experience, they hope to empower more people to take this knowledge and make a difference.

"Supportive Girl Talk" Provides Summer Fun

by Cecily Faenza
CLAS '09

For Amy Pimentel, reaching out to the community extends beyond the school year and into the summer. This past summer break, Amy created a girl's only program in conjunction with Mansfield Youth Services, which she named "Supportive Girl Talk and Summer Fun." The program met once a week for six weeks in July and August for girls in grades five through nine. With the help of Kathy McNamara and Patricia Michalak, of Mansfield Youth Services, the program offered adolescent girls a place to "come together, learn from each other, and improve their self-esteem", according to Amy.

The inspiration stemmed from Amy's belief that "young girls have a difficult time managing their feelings and understanding why they may feel the way they do." The program emphasized the importance of a positive attitude and be-

coming comfortable with the feelings that stem from shared experiences. "Supportive Girl Talk and Summer Fun" provided a peer to peer environment that allowed the girls to give and receive support.

"a peer to peer environment that allowed the girls to give and receive support"
- Amy Pimentel,

*Coordinator, Youth Development & Education:
Adolescents*

While creating this program, Amy generated six basic program goals. She strove to build a supportive framework for all girls which would enable girls to share their experiences and understand that they are not alone. She wanted to create a fun, relaxing environment for girls to communicate, and thus enhance

their communication skills. The program strove to teach the girls how to discuss issues in an appropriate and non-offensive manner and to recognize positive attributes.

It was difficult for Amy to identify just one meaningful aspect of the program. Not only did Amy connect with and teach these girls valuable lessons, but she learned from them as well. She described the opportunity to see girls of different ages and backgrounds come together and support one another as "truly great."

In Amy's opinion, the most rewarding part of the program was the honor of being trusted with a new program and new girls she had never met before. In addition, she is "truly thankful" to know that she "made an impact on their lives, just by listening to what they had to say."

Amy looks forward to working with Mansfield Youth Services to continue the program in the future.

Community Outreach Adds Two New Staff Members

The Office of Community Outreach welcomed two new staff members, Megan Marshall and Miguel Colón to the professional team this fall. We set out to learn more about our newest leaders.

Meg Marshall hails from Rocky Hill, CT and is an alumnus of the University of Rhode Island (Class of 2003). Meg will be devoting her time to the Language and Literacy programs, with a focus on the new Jumpstart program.

What were you doing prior to your arrival at UConn? Were you involved in other service organizations/projects?

Prior to UCONN I was serving as a volunteer with Catholic Relief Services, the largest Catholic International Development and Relief organization in the world. I lived and worked in El Salvador while monitoring the human rights of migrants in transit. Prior to El Salvador I lived and served in Belize and Detroit through other volunteer programs. My experiences are strongly rooted in service and mutual accompaniment.

What aspect of the Office of Community Outreach are you most excited about?

I'm really excited to work with students who are engaged in service and meaningful work in their lives. I am constantly reminded about the natural inclination of the human spirit to engage with others in a life giving way and I am inspired by their enthusiasm and dedication to their community and the world around them.

What portion of CO will you be working on this year?

I will be working with the Language and Literacy programs that our student leaders engage in and in particular, a new program called Jumpstart. Our goal is to help students get into the classroom, obtain new skills through real experiences and be moved to be an advocate for healthy children and their families.

What inspired you to make service your career?

I've had a lot of fantastic role models in my life that empowered me to engage in



Megan Marshall

Meg's Favorite:

Book: Mountains Beyond Mountains by Tracy Kidder

Movie: The Motorcycle Diaries

Food: Pupusas (Salvadoran cuisine)

Season: Spring

Quote: "Be the change you want to see in the world"

-Ghandi

"If you want peace, work for justice."

- Pope Paul VI

meaningful work. I chose a life of service because I am more motivated by empowering people and creating systemic change through my gifts and talents than I am in making money or climbing up the corporate ladder. I am inspired by everyday people who continue to shine in their community even if they do not have all the resources they need.



Miguel Colón

Miguel's Favorite:

Book: Hundred Years of Solitude (Spanish version)

Movie: Brave Heart

Food: Puerto Rican Food

Season: Summer (if I have AC)

Quote: "Good things happen to good people"

Miguel Colón is a native of Bridgeport, CT. He spent his college years at Connecticut College in New London.

What were you doing prior to your arrival at UConn? Were you involved in other service organizations/projects?

I was the Assistant Director of Service Learning and Volunteer Programs at

Sacred Heart University. I was also involved with Habitat for Humanity.

What aspect of the Office of Community Outreach are you most excited about?

I am excited about working with so many people.

What portion of CO will you be working on this year?

I will oversee the Youth Development & Education (Children & Adolescents) Programs, Community Outreach Transportation and Co-teach the Learning Community course.

What inspired you to make service your career?

I have been inspired by people, especially those in need. They never stop dreaming and want the best for their families and friends, which reminds me of my own dreams.

Upcoming Community Service Days

10/7 Special Olympics Connecticut: Chowder Fest @ Mystic Seaport

10/7 Camp Horizons: Fall Cleanup

10/7 Mansfield Public Works: Clean Up Your Town!

10/20 The Cornerstone Foundation, Inc.: Cleaning Kitchen Area/Painting Office

10/20 Windham Area Interfaith Ministry: Community Garden

10/20 Covenant Soup Kitchen: Special Projects

10/20 Mansfield Parks and Recreation: Natural Areas Volunteers

10/20 Windham Parent Network: Fall Clean Sweet @ Memorial Park Playground

10/20 Windham Textile and History Museum: Cataloging and Preserving Collections

Visit www.volunteer.uconn.edu to sign up or contact Community Service Days at uconncsds@yahoo.com

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Phone: 860-486-1165

Upcoming Service Opportunities

Husky Sport

This program is a University of Connecticut outreach program designed to create more opportunities for sport and physical activity for youths living in Connecticut. The Husky Sport program hopes to raise funds for general operating support and to purchase these and other items to be used in programs conducted at various Husky Sport program sites.

Contact: Dr. Jennifer Bruening, Director of Husky Sport at (860) 486-5139 or email jordan.maleh@uconn.edu

KIDSAFE CT/Cornerstone Teen Program

Are you patient, energetic, compassionate? Bring your skills to the Community Center in Rockville and make a difference in the lives of adolescents ages 11 and up. The program is a drop-in center which caters to many at-risk kids who want a safe, supportive place to spend their after school time playing basketball, pool, air hockey, etc.

Contact: Paula Plante, Youth Programs Coordinator @ (860)872-1918.

Volunteers Needed at Even Start

Even Start is looking for students to have lunch with preschoolers (lunch is included) **Monday - Friday from 11:15 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.** The position would be a great opportunity for nutrition majors. The school is also looking for a female student who would be interested in helping them develop a socialization program for pregnant women, as well as someone interested in helping them out with administrative/clerical duties.

Contact: Debby Becker - becker.ahec@snet.net

Hire-a-Habitater

Habitat for Humanity is looking to help you with odd jobs in your yard, home, office or dorm! The money you would normally pay to have the work done by an outside source would then be donated to Habitat. Proceeds will support Habitat in building homes locally among other activities. Email Habitat your odd jobs, how many people you would estimate are needed, your name and phone number.

Contact: uconnhabitat@gmail.com