

# CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, STANISLAUS



## THE SERVICE LEARNING NEWSLETTER

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Academics with Service builds stronger communities



Dr. Tamara Sniezek,  
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### **Faculty Focus**

Dr. Tamara Sniezek,  
Sociology

*Community Partner:*  
*C.A.R.E.S. Resource Center*

“I can’t really explain how much this experience has affected my life. I am so thankful for the time I had and for the people I met. My eyes have been opened to a whole new world that I would never have known if I didn’t take this class. In the beginning, I was scared and didn’t know what to expect. I was one of those people who had the typical thoughts of the homeless. Now my whole outlook is totally different.”

- Crystal Raj, Student, *SOCL 3500: Sociology of Poverty and Hunger*, Spring 2006

Service learning can create life changing experiences for students. I recently discovered this as I incorporated service learning into two of my Sociology courses: *SOCL 3500: Sociology of Poverty and Hunger* and *SOCL 4740: Sociology of Mental Health*. Students worked closely with the homeless at the C.A.R.E.S. (Community Action and Resources for Empowerment and Sustainability) Resource Center. C.A.R.E.S. provides resources and referrals for the local homeless population. Students in the Poverty and Hunger course worked with the homeless on various tasks including teaching the homeless to read, providing computer assistance, and helping with job or housing searches. In the Sociology of Mental Health course, students shadowed mental health care and other social service providers as they counseled the homeless at the center.

Students reported that their experiences with the homeless made the course material “come to life.” As an instructor, I can describe poverty or mental illness in detail and never truly impart a sense of what it is like to be impoverished or mentally ill. The service learning component did what I could not; it gave the students first hand knowledge of the experiences of the homeless. Students developed a sensitivity and awareness of the challenges and obstacles these disadvantaged groups face. In the end, the students were much more empathetic and understanding of these, often misunderstood, groups.

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Probably the most important benefit of service learning at the resource center is that students' stereotypes of the homeless were shattered. As one student in my fall Poverty and Hunger course noted while reflecting on her experience at C.A.R.E.S.:

"I have only been to the resource center two times and already I notice how the clients are nothing like what I expected. ... I met "Debbie" who looked very clean and well dressed. She was in a good mood because she was going to a job interview."

Student's perceptions of the homeless as lazy, drug addicts, dirty, or unmotivated were often challenged. Students frequently admitted being surprised at how much the homeless were like themselves.

Student's views of the homeless not only changed, but so did their actions. A number of students started attending City Council meetings and would enthusiastically report their experiences to the class. This led to meaningful class discussion about local politics and organizational forms of discrimination. Some students' interest in the homeless and local politics did not end on the last day of class. Several students continue to volunteer at the C.A.R.E.S. Resource Center and/or remain politically involved one year after the course.

As an instructor, I also have changed as a result of these service learning experiences. I am better informed about the local conditions and resources affecting the homeless and mentally ill in Turlock and the surrounding community. Furthermore, I have become more politically active and stepped up my own service to the community.

Incorporating service learning into the classroom has taken me out of my comfort zone and forced me to depart from the traditional lecture-driven, faculty-focused curriculum. The students' service learning experiences are brought back to the classroom to inform the academic dialogue. This has forced me to share control over learning outcomes. However, it has also given me greater contact with the students and much closer relationships with them. Through service learning I am building stronger connections to my students and the community.

- Dr. Tamara Sniezek

### Service Learning Faculty Memos

The question is often asked: "How do we define what is 'service' in the context of Service Learning?"

The quick answer is that the service needs to be connected with the class curriculum to help students deepen their learning of the course objectives while the activity they are performing benefits the community. Next, there are different activities that constitute the "service" activity in a service learning class and these experiences can be classified in the following ways: Direct Service, Indirect Service, Advocacy, and Research.

**DIRECT SERVICE:** Students' service activities interact one-on-one directly with the recipients. Students engaged in their

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### Tamara Sniezek, Ph.D. Sociology

Dr. Sniezek earned her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her areas of interest include family, gender, and qualitative methods. Currently, she is conducting research on the changing nature of couple relationships during engagement and wedding. She is also involved in a study that examines social factors that affect declining male enrollment in college.

California State University,  
Stanislaus Service Learning  
students become engaged in  
numerous types of service  
activities, as you will see on  
the page 3 side bar.

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*Direct Service:* A student and her senior partner from the Salvation Army show their completed Life Scrapbook during a childhood development course.



*Indirect Service:* Students construct garden beds that will grow vegetables to be distributed to those in need through the United Samaritans Foundation in Turlock.



*Research:* Public Administration students conduct a survey of voting stations for the Modesto-based community agency, Disability Resource Agency for Independent Living, to determine if these stations meet specifications of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

service activity develop problem-solving and other skill sets related to their discipline. They learn about caring for others in different age or ethnic groups.

**INDIRECT SERVICE:** These activities do not provide service to individuals, but the students' service has indirect benefits to the community or environment as a whole. Examples of indirect service would be stocking a food pantry, collecting clothing for a shelter, or building and maintaining a garden for food distribution to those in need.

**ADVOCACY:** Service in this area creates awareness of or promotes action on an issue of public interest. Activities in this area include writing letters, sponsoring a town meeting, performing a play or public speaking on issues and concerns that effect the community being addressed.

**RESEARCH:** Research projects can involve students in finding, gathering, and reporting on information in the public interest. Other projects conduct formal studies, evaluations, experiments, or interviews for the public good.

- Excerpted from *The Complete Guide to Service Learning*  
by Cathryn Berger Kaye, M.A.

The Office of Service Learning can assist faculty to develop and implement service learning in their curriculum. If you wish to know more about our work, including upcoming workshops on service learning, call Julie Fox at 667-3311.

### Child Development Senior Portfolio Presentations

On Wednesday, May 30, the CSU Stanislaus Child Development Faculty in the College of Human and Health Sciences with support from the Office of Service Learning hosted community leaders from many regional agencies for its CSU Stanislaus Child Development Senior Portfolio Presentations. School administrators, teachers, counselors, and social workers visited the University to review graduating seniors' work, provide professional insight, and discuss current and anticipated community needs.

This annual program is the highlight of a project begun in 2000 when the Child Development faculty invited community professionals to participate in focus groups that would set the course of revisions to its undergraduate major. At that time community leaders asked for greater emphasis on team building, leadership, and interventions for children with challenging behaviors. The major was revised, taking a competency-based format and courses were added to the beginning and end of the degree program for assessment of student competency and program effectiveness. A senior seminar and internship was created to help

students develop their worldviews and prepare professional documents.

These documents have become the centerpiece of this external review that is now hosted by the Department of Psychology and Child Development and the Office of Service Learning at the conclusion of each semester.

Integral to the senior experience, community internships have placed students in an array of potential career settings. Students spend a total of 72 internship hours working with supervision of program staff in placements that provide insight into the daily lives and roles of child development professionals. The accompanying seminar offers students in diverse placements a venue to compare philosophies, leadership styles, grant writing, child development infrastructures, and contemporary issues in the field.

The gathering in May was a great opportunity for the community and the University to network and exchange ideas about what is needed in the child development community. Students had the opportunity to be interviewed by professionals who gave them individualized guidance and critique. Previous student participants have commented that illustrating their philosophies with professionals has given them a sense of professionalism and closure as they draw near to graduation day.

The community participants had an opportunity to share with faculty new directions and feedback about how well CDEV graduates meet their programmatic needs, as well to get a heads up on the upcoming class of prospective graduates. The portfolio presentations are the culmination of the students' academic careers and the ultimate service-learning experience. Faculty, students, and community professionals truly look forward to this event each spring and fall.

- Dr. Rita Asher, Professor & Child Development Coordinator

### New Faces in Service Learning

C.A.R.E.S. Resource Center welcomes two dynamic new staff members: Ms. Esther McKoon, Operations Coordinator, and Mr. Hugo Ramirez, Community Outreach Coordinator. Their work with our faculty, students, and community partners are proving invaluable to advance the operation of this important community center.

The resource center always welcomes service learning courses. Recent areas have included Accounting, Sociology, English, and Politics and Public Administration. Other areas such as Business Management, Psychology, Nursing, Communication Studies, Geography, Ethnic Studies, Art, and History could all find interesting projects to enhance student learning and assist with numerous community issues related to the Center. If you would like more information on how your class can help benefit the work being done at the C.A.R.E.S. Resource Center and contribute to the well-being of our community, please contact Anna Epperson at 667-3669 or Julie Fox at 667-3311.



Psychology students present their senior portfolios to representatives of community and social service agencies in the region.



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