Faculty Focus
Dr. David Colnic,
Politics & Public Administration

Dr. Dave Colnic, Assistant Professor, Politics and Public Administration and his students enrolled in PSCI 3304: Introduction to Public Administration course assisted the Disability Resource Agency for Independent Living (DRAIL) and the United Samaritans Foundation in various service projects benefiting our community. Dr. Colnic offered the following remarks about his student’s service learning experiences:

“Encouraging student community involvement represents one of the most exciting aspects of teaching applied to political science courses. This participation generates myriad benefits for both the students and their communities. Community service organizations and their stakeholders see immediate tangible results through student engagement. During the fall 2005 semester, Public Administration students worked with the United Samaritans Foundation to increase volunteerism in Stanislaus County. Additionally, students worked with DRAIL to monitor impediments facing disabled persons at polling sites. As traditional government institutions face increasing shortages and bulging demands, the importance of these community organizations and their volunteers similarly expands. By participating in service learning projects, these students help strengthen our communities.

“Student’s service projects play a significant role in their educational and personal development while giving back to the community. As students apply concepts learned in the class to real world settings, another level of learning takes place. Opportunities for learning and insight, both professionally and personally, that cannot be simulated, routinely occur when they put their knowledge to work in the community. For instance, nearly every student who participated in a service activity talked about the remarkable translation of an intellectual knowledge of

(Please see page 2)
public problems – either homelessness in Stanislaus County or inaccessible polling places – to an awareness of the personal and societal scopes of these problems. The translation significantly deepened students understanding for both the specifics of the problem and the roles of public administration in resolving these problems. The students learned that, despite the intractability of these problems, positive, theoretical-informed reforms can make a difference. In short, these experiences demonstrated to students that classroom concepts have societal implications.

“Finally, the service learning experience helps students’ personal development. Tangential to learning theories and facts, a university education should inspire critical thinking, promote the acquisition of technical skills, and connect students to communities. Based on student reflections, these service learning projects helped students recognize the extent that actual public and non-profit administrators must adapt to resource scarcity, imperfect information, and conflicting values. Devising the preferred course of action in less than perfect decision making conditions inspired critical thought and innovation. Likewise, the specific projects required students to either draft a grant proposal to facilitate volunteerism at United Samaritans or monitor legal requirements for polling places under the Americans with Disabilities Act. If these projects may appear narrow in focus, the skills they require are directly relevant to a host of endeavors in the private, public, and non-profit sectors. Many students contemplating legal careers completed the DRAIL project to gain insight into assessment of compliance with administrative law. Finally, several students are continuing their participation with these community organizations and a handful are seeking additional groups to work with.”

The Office of Service Learning welcomed California State University, Stanislaus’ new President, Dr. Ham Shirvani to our campus with a community reception on October 19, 2005. Over fifty community partners eagerly met with Dr. Shirvani and were excited by his innovative vision of campus and community partnerships. Dr. Shirvani’s expertise in architecture allowed him to share a unique perspective on building a firm foundation for campus and community collaboration. Guests were also treated to a preview of a new service learning video program featuring The Bridge Community Resource Center in Modesto. The video also highlighted issues discussed by Dr. Shirvani, such as the value of service to the community as a means to deepen the educational experience of our students, while instilling a civic ethic into their lives as future professionals. Dr. April Hejka-Ekins, Director of the Master of Public Administration program, Mr. Robert Dittman, Principal, Empire Elementary School, and Ms. Gabriela Delamora, senior in Sociology and Honors student spoke on the impact service learning has made in their careers, to the community and the value of service learning as a educational methodology.
California State University, Stanislaus has been awarded a two-year $596,399 grant from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to open a multi-service Homeless Resource Center in Turlock. Our campus will partner with the City of Turlock, United Samaritans Foundation, We Care Shelter Program, Stanislaus County Outreach Program, Community Housing and Shelter Services, and the Stanislaus Literacy Center to realize this much needed resource in our community.

Faculty and staff working on this project include:
- Mr. Sean Burns, Lecturer, Accounting and Finance
- Dr. Steven Filling, Associate Professor, Accounting and Finance, and Co-Principal Investigator
- Julie Fox, Coordinator, Office of Service Learning, and Co-Principal Investigator
- Dr. John Garcia, Associate Professor, Master of Social Work Program, and Co-Director, Center for Public Policy Studies
- Dr. Kelvin Jasek-Rysdahl, Associate Professor, Economics, and Co-Director, Center for Public Policy Studies
- Mr. Paul Sivak, Coordinator/Lecturer, Child Welfare Training Project
- Dr. Tamara Sniezek, Professor, Sociology
- Ms. Peggy Stepro, graduate student, Master of Social Work

Please contact the Office of Service Learning at 667-3311 if you would like to participate in this innovative project.

The Office of Service Learning co-hosted an innovative luncheon and evening forum for K-16 educators and administrators on September 19, 2005 with the theme: “Educating for Democracy.” A panelist of distinguished educators from across the state, as well as representatives from the National Network for Educational Renewal and the First Amendment Schools Project, discussed important ideas to foster greater civic education in our schools. Faculty from the College of Education listened to an overview about the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and discussed the role of Higher Education in fostering civic engagement. Additionally, the community was invited to attend an evening forum with our panelists and community service agencies. Participants broke out into small groups to discuss on the efforts of the Civic Mission of Schools and our region’s local endeavors to improve civic education for K-16 students.
The Office of Service Learning was awarded a $6,000 grant from Best Buy Co. Inc. and Learn and Serve America to develop projects to commemorate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. During the week of January 9 to 14, the Office of Service Learning partnered with the Stanislaus County Office of Education and the King Kennedy Memorial Center in Modesto. CSU Stanislaus students worked with junior high students to learn about Dr. King’s legacy of becoming an agent of social change in their communities. On Friday, January 13, and Saturday, January 14, Mr. Russell Means, an indigenous rights/constitutional rights activist discussed Dr. King’s civic legacy. Junior high students are currently designing a mural to reflect the changes they would like to see in their community. The Mural will be displayed at the King Kennedy Memorial Center upon its completion.

Spring 2006

February - March: Volunteer Return Preparation Program (formally known as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance or VITA). Accounting students will assist low-income individuals and families submit federal and state income tax forms. This successful program is in collaboration with the IRS, Empire Elementary School District, Community Trust Credit Union, and CSU Stanislaus. The program will take place at Empire Elementary School and the Salvation Army in Turlock.

April: Civic Mission of Education. In collaboration with the Stanislaus County Office of Education, Modesto High School students will work with CSU Stanislaus Honors students on Project Citizen to select and analyze public policy issues. Students will work through a process to either change or create a pertinent policy issue of their interest.

April: Cesar E. Chavez Day Celebration. Now in its 11th year, this annual celebration will commemorate the life and social legacy of Mr. Chavez. In collaboration with Stanislaus County Office of Education and Community Trust Credit Union, elementary, junior high, and high school students participate in the 5th annual Poetry, Essay, and Poster contest honoring Mr. Chavez’s values of civic responsibility. The students’ award winning works will be on display during the celebration. The evening will also include community speakers and musical entertainment.

April: Faculty Service Learning Training Workshop at the John Stuart Rogers Faculty Development Center. Date to be announced.