

For inclusion in the **President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll:**

Exemplary Community Service

Project Title and Issue addressed

The SERVE – Service Experiences for ReVitalizing Education – Program began in 1996 in the College of Education at CSULB. The mission of the program is to create an opportunity for students at the undergraduate level, in particular for those who are considering careers in K-12 education, to learn about the realities of urban classrooms and the needs of the diverse K-12 student population. The SERVE Program is a Long Beach Education Partnership Project.

Students in the SERVE Program provide support to students at risk. **SERVE interns work with students individually and in small groups to provide academic support and encourage personal growth.** It is through this involvement that CSULB students assess their career goals and provide direct service to students and teachers in grades K-12 and their communities.

Number of participating students and service hours

Student participation has been during regular academic sessions as well as winter and summer sessions. **Over the past 11 years, 6,371 students have participated in SERVE, dedicating in excess of 520,000 service hours to their communities.** The design of the program has remained intact over the years: direct contact with students at risk; a minimum of 40 hours per placement in the field. Adjustments to the program's implementation have been made according to course requirements, student populations, as well as feedback and requirements from the field (i.e., stricter clearance procedures to include fingerprinting and Department of Justice screening of all volunteers).

The elements that have contributed greatly to the program are institutional support, collaborations with community agencies, and support from Federal Work-Study. Institutional support is in the form of resources and involvement of professors and departments. **Collaboration with over fifty school districts in Los Angeles and Orange Counties over the years as well as community agencies such as Head Start, BLAST (Better Learning After School Today), and the Signal Hill Public Library** have also had a major impact on our work. Our collaborative efforts with the Office of Financial Aid has solidified the **America Reads/America Counts program through Federal Work-Study**, with consistent hiring of 25-30 students each year to work as tutors in K-8 schools. Recruitment, placement, re-hiring, and continuous support to the students in America Reads/America Counts from both **the SERVE office and the Office of Financial Aid** gives the students an avenue to becoming involved in their community, explore teaching as a career, and be supported in their own education while earning their Federal Work-Study award.

Exemplary Special Focus

"Services to youth from disadvantaged circumstances aimed at lowering school dropout rates and preparing students for college"

Within the SERVE Program, a **Special Focus Project** is in its Fourth term - (term). It began as a pilot program with students in SERVE who are enrolled in **Elementary Education (EDEL) 300, Equity and Justice in Diverse Schools**. The intent was to ensure that all students in the EDEL 300 course at CSULB worked 40 hours with students at risk and English Language Learners in schools with urban, poor and diverse populations and languages and cultural backgrounds.

The coordinator of EDEL 300, Dr. Marsha Thicksten, and the director of the SERVE Program, Hilda Sramek, began January, 07 by visiting schools to determine which sites would participate in the project. They met with all the principals at the schools and a designated site coordinator to oversee the placement of CSULB students at their school. The schools that participated in Spring 2007 were Whittier Elementary in Long Beach USD, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary and Sierra Middle School in Santa Ana USD, and Anderson Elementary and Warner Middle School in Westminster School District.

After meeting with all the principals and coordinators at the sites, up to 20 SERVE students were placed in each school. Several students were asked to shadow students who needed one-on-one attention. Some of the K-8 students would have regular absences from school; others would sit in class and not complete any written work. Our students worked continually with the K-8 students who needed the additional support for 40 hours over the course of the semester.

The questions that guided this experience were:

- Will a large cohort of SERVE students in one school **impact academic success** for students in one school?
- Will the students in EDEL 300 **have a greater understanding and ability to meet the needs of students at risk and English Language Learners?** (Reflected in their final ethnography)
- Will the students' understanding and ability to meet the needs of students at risk and English Language Learners be **reflected in later surveys when they are teaching in their own classrooms?**
- Will large cohorts in one school **serve as role models to the K-8 students to attend college?**
- Will **individual students at risk improve their school attendance and academic work** due to the presence of our CSULB students in their school?

In our second term of the **Special Focus Project** with EDEL 300 we have added more schools in various regions to accommodate our students. We now have Butler Elementary, International Elementary and Mary McLeod Bethune Transitional Center for

students who are homeless in Long Beach Unified School District, and Rivera Elementary in El Rancho School Unified District. The collaboration among different professors teaching the course makes this project even more promising, as each one contributes ideas and proposals of sites for the placement of students in the field. The experiential learning remains key: the connection between theory and practice. In our fourth term we have added the following schools. We have visited schools which have teacher reports that the CSULB SERVE students are making a difference in educational outcomes of students and that teachers especially appreciate the work that CSULB students are doing with students inside classrooms. Rather than observe and sit in the back of classroom CSULB SERVE students are actively working with small groups or tutoring or assessing and monitoring students work and learning

In the state of California near 40 % of students drop out of high school and never graduate. This is an approximate 10% increase from 20 years ago. One of our many foci this term is to have our SERVE students work and learn more about the student, his or her family and community. Students are asked locate community services for families and students at risk in the community. They are asked to attend school functions to build a report with the student over the full semester. To know that student academically, socially emotionally developmentally cognitively. To observe the child interacting on the playground and with teachers and other students. To be diagnostic about the needs of the student and teach to those needs through tutoring or small group or to shadow students to keep them on task. This term we are expanding the fieldwork for students to include special needs populations beyond --- to special education for this particular course SERVE work for selected students. And this term we have evidence that some schools have increased API score by substantial amounts. We have student self reports in Ethnographical Research stating that they have never learned so much about real urban schools and student learning. We are in the process of setting up interviews with school personal to ascertain more data about this project. Students and teachers are learning from each other in that many teachers in middle schools were not accustomed to having support persons in their classrooms to work with students only. As we gather data in each partnership school we will develop a plan to improve the work we are doing as partners. We have asked for honest critique. Dialogue from K-8 students, coordinators and administrators and teachers has enabled us to hone the rough edges of this project. : (Hilda can we write coordinators and ask if their API scores have improved over last two years? to keep teachers teaching in urban schools with high numbers of students at risk; to keep students at risk and English Language Learners in school learning and graduating from school, and to encourage their plans for college; to enhance academic success for students at risk – for all students. This year we are piloting student visits to CSULB classes and touring the university in one school district,

To date we had students in schools with high ELL students. This 4th term we are including schools with not only Latinos, Asian Americans but also African American inner city schools with high African American populations (need stats from Compton).

A handful of our students are working in afterschool programs that have partnerships with the school district.

Although teachers and administrators report that this partnership is making a difference academically and relieving teacher stress with the assistance in classrooms

and we have evidence of this as well as SERVE student ethnographies that give description of specific ways this has helped students teachers academics and their own preparation to be teachers in urban schools we are co creating a questionnaire to ascertain at deeper levels the nuanced ways that the SERVE EDEL 300 partnership with urban school districts is making a difference as well as ways we can strengthen this effort.

Conclusion

The strength of this partnership is that all of us are both teachers and learners. Our students are learning while they teach and tutor, teachers inside schools are learning to put volunteers to good use by allowing them to work directly with students, Administrators and coordinators are teaching university faculty and staff the realities of urban schools, university faculty and staff or are building partnerships that evolve according to student need. A significant step is that coursework will soon be taught in the community's school sites as pilots for further access to university and college going by having course work at a school where we are partnering. If the university can go into the school and community it is visible and can seem accessible to families and children who are at risk.

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