

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT CAL STATE LA

*Many opportunities for student volunteers to give and learn*

By Michelle Hawley

For many students and faculty at CSULA, learning is not something that begins and ends in the classroom. Rather, it involves a transformative pedagogy called service-learning that links academic knowledge with real-life experience, community problems, and civic issues. It is the mission of the Office of Service-Learning to support this kind of work by engaging students, faculty, and community partners in collaborative relationships that embrace diversity and social justice. In so doing, the Office of Service-Learning supports a broader university-

wide culture of community engagement at CSULA.

CSULA's rich history of working with its surrounding communities can be seen in the legacy of longstanding programs like EPIC (Educational Participation in Communities), created in 1968 by students committed to addressing urban social problems, and the Pat Brown Institute of Public Affairs, founded in 1979.

More recently, the Center for the Study of Genders and Sexualities (CSGS), a presidentially chartered Center, was founded in 2002 to support scholars, teachers, students,

and community partners who investigate gender and sexuality, and in particular work that bridges diverse communities represented at CSULA and its surrounding area.

The CSGS is housed in the College of Arts and Letters as the American Communities Program, which explores the development of American Communities in the local, national, and transnational contexts.

The College of Engineering is working with The Los Angeles Infrastructure Academy and

with Americorps to mentor and prepare students to enter skilled trades including Engineering.

The College of Natural and Social Sciences is developing a new multi-disciplinary Urban Studies Program that will give students the opportunity to participate in important urban policy challenges, increase service learning and community volunteer options, and engage in professional internships in the field.

At the February 8 Symposium on Community Engagement, the many individuals who believe the University has an important role to play in the community will have an opportunity to work together. As Dr. Alfredo Gonzalez, Dean of Undergraduate Studies,

recognized when he came up with the idea for the symposium, CSULA can become a better community partner and make more significant contributions to civic life if it strategically coordinates its efforts. To this end, the goals of this campus-wide conversation are practical and include identifying community engagement practices and possibilities in the courses, curriculum, and Missions of the University and its Colleges.

The nationally recognized scholar Amy Driscoll will facilitate the discussion. Dr. Driscoll has served as Director of Community/University Partnerships at Portland State University, Director of Teaching Learning and Assessment at CSU Monterey Bay, and as a scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, where she helped develop the new Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement.

Dr. Driscoll's talk will explore the possibility of becoming an institution distinguished by community engagement. Her knowledge and expertise, gained from extensive work with universities across the nation, will help participants examine the existing strengths and practices that support community engagement and consider how to build a foundation for future action.

In thus looking towards the future, California State University, Los Angeles is keeping step with Universities across the U.S. that are making Community Engagement central to their mission. When Time magazine selected USC as its College of the Year in 2000, it highlighted USC's contributions to the public as demonstrated in its service-learning and experiential education programs. The days in which the University could function as an "ivory tower" at a distance from the lives of those it served are over. Now more than ever, the nation is looking to higher education for leadership and renewal of its public culture and democratic citizenship. CSULA's longstanding commitment to its community partners has positioned it take the next step and become a leader in the growing movement. ■

*Michelle Hawley is the Faculty Director of the Office of Service Learning, which is organizing a campus Symposium on Community Engagement on February 8. For more information on Service Learning at CSULA visit [www.calstatela.edu/centers/sl/](http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/sl/) ■*



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