

ORGANIZING COMMUNITIES FOR EQUITY AND JUSTICE IN SAN DIEGO!

Justice Overcoming Boundaries project with University of San Diego Ethnic Studies Program

June 2007

The Ethnic Studies program and the Center for Community Service-Learning are interested in offering USD students hands-on opportunities for work with social change groups. Service-learning has been shown to be extremely effective in increasing academic engagement and performance, developing students' career directions as well as moral/spiritual/personal/social dimensions of their lives, their leadership abilities, and their commitment to racial and economic justice. The incorporation of service-learning at USD has been extremely effective in reaching the institutional goals expressed in our mission statement. Ethnic Studies has made the incorporation of service-learning a critical and central part of their academic mission, and is seeking to increase the depth of connection that students can experience in social change organizations.

In San Diego there are a number of faith-based community organizing groups, and JOB, "Justice Overcoming Boundaries", an affiliate of the national Gamaliel organization, has been particularly open to collaboration. Their themes—immigration reform, housing, health access, and education—have a particularly strong impact on immigrants from Mexico, legal as well as undocumented. JOB organizers took the lead on the April 9, 2005 march that drew over 50,000 participants to appeal for immigration reform, and on June 20th held a Citizenship Workshop at which 350 persons completed paperwork.

The original intention to have students trained in Gamaliel's week-long program held at USD in Summer 2006 did not occur—only Elaine Elliott was able to attend and the grant paid for her participation. Two students will attend training in Chicago in August 2007, which is what \$2000 in roll-over funds have been designated to cover.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, JOB partnered with USD in the following ways:

- Social Issues Conference presentation on registration of Hispanics to vote.
- Norma Chavez, lead organizer, presented to on building relationships as a foundation for community organizing work and modeled how to hold these one-on-one conversations in the fall "Leadership through Service-Learning class" with 20 students who then applied this in their leadership.
- Three meetings on immigration activism were held on campus.
- Two dialogues were held at USD on faith and values.
- USD Center for Community Service-Learning became a member of JOB in April
- USD students participated in the city-wide event to welcome new board members and select what issues to address.
- Valerie Lizarraga included JOB leader Estela de los Rios in the town hall dialogue that was held regarding the no-match letters received by USD employees and attended by approximately 100 people.

- Valerie Lizarraga, USD junior, has committed to becoming a JOB board member along with Elaine Elliott, and attended one board meeting.

The goal of offering coaching to students was met in a number of ways. The Community Service-Learning staff was able to use JOB materials in leadership training sessions, organizers held hour-long individual meetings with five students to assist them in learning to lead social change efforts, a number of group meetings were held with students, and a student member was invited to be part of the board of directors as mentioned above. Seven students attended an off-campus dialogue on building momentum based on our faith and values led by Mary Gonzalez, lead national organizer for Gamaliel. On-going training continued through a 1-unit class on “Leadership for Social Change” offered by Elaine Elliott with some participation from Dr. Alberto Pulido. JOB resources on how to build a leadership team were used in the class. This class met weekly and students each had a social change project that they led:

- Suzanne Brunn, Health Access
- Lucy Eagleson, Youth with disabilities
- Jennifer Gunsch, Access to College
- Megan Higginbotham, Dialogues on faith and action
- Nancy Marin, Immigration
- Joe Mike Valdez, Campus community service engagement through AS
- Andrew Camera, Campus community service engagement through Greek system

Two students from the “Leadership through Service-Learning course”, Adam Love and Ruth Soberanes, participated in a number of JOB events and will continue their leadership in this coming year.

Specific tasks accomplished by the JOB organizers to provide on-going coaching for these students included the following:

- A team of four USD students participated in the planning for faith and values dialogues with the help of organizer Jessica Nolan, and co-led the dialogue with her.
- One intern—Nancy Marin—worked with Estela de los Rios to plan a major citizenship fair.
- Jessica Nolan, organizer, held hour-long individual conversations with students from the class to encourage their leadership development.
- Jessica Nolan worked on a learning plan with the two leaders selected to attend national training.
- Jessica Nolan met with four students to work on plans for an education community area at the upcoming Fiesta del Sol.

Valerie Lizarraga and Megan Higginbotham showed significant leadership all semester and have been selected to attend the summer training. Megan took leadership in the dialogues on faith and values. Valerie not only participated in leadership training, but she also led an effort on behalf of employees dismissed from USD over Social Security no-

match letters in coordination with the Romero Center. She was a key organizer for the town hall meeting held with over 100 in attendance, and for the crucial meeting with the women and a representative from Dr. Lyons that resulted in the offer for these employees to re-apply to USD.

The goal of the relationship with JOB is to create a core of students at USD who both understand the issues addressed (immigration, housing, health access, and education access) and also understand methods to work for change. The emphasis is on providing training for students and opportunities for enough participation so they can see the real-world difficulties and decisions that go into social change work.

The relevance to the US/Mexico border is the organization's commitment to just and humane immigration reform, based on the same faith principles of Catholic Social thought that are expressed in the pastoral letter, "Strangers No Longer."