“No social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of dedicated individuals”

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Scholar Activists
How are you working together?
“I am trying to see the big picture and I want to impact it”
“I am building relationships and broadening my understanding”
“I am deepening my knowledge and developing the skills.”
“I am analyzing systems and how they can perpetuate the inequities.”
“I am creating alternatives and constructing consensus.”
“I am taking risks and leaving my comfort zone.”
“I am working hard and joining together with others to lead towards a better future – for myself and for all of us together.”
Gratitude and joy to the scholar activists!

- Tracee Reiser
  Associate Dean for Community Learning
  Director, Office of Volunteers for Community Service
  Associate Director Holleran Center
Out-of-School Activities: An Essential Aspect of Education

by Professor Jennifer Fredricks, Connecticut College

In this commentary, I make the case for broadening our notion of education to consider organized out-of-school activities (i.e., extracurricular activities, after school programming) as an essential aspect of education. I describe the reasons why these activities provide unique opportunities for learning and development and review the research linking participation to higher achievement, physical health, and mental health functioning. I conclude by arguing that cuts to extracurricular and after-school programming is a misguided and costly policy decision.

Students are only in school for 7 hours a day, 180 days of the year, which leaves a significant time period for youth to be involved in either risky or productive activities. One way many youth choose to spend this time is in organized activities, like sports, the arts, and after school-programs. Youth who participate in organized out-of-school activities have less time available to spend in unstructured and unsupervised contexts, both of which have been linked to less positive developmental outcomes. The difference in behavior and affect between school and organized out-of-school contexts is also striking. Youth report high concentration and attention in organized activities, like sports and the arts, while they report high levels of boredom and low intrinsic motivation in traditional academic contexts.

Participation in organized activities can provide unique opportunities for learning, positive growth, and development. Youth who participate in school-based extracurricular contexts have been found to have stronger relations with teachers and have more academically-oriented peers than youth who are not involved in extracurricular activities. Through participation, youth also can develop a wide range of skills, many of which are more difficult to develop in traditional academic settings. In qualitative research, youth report that they learned emotional, cognitive, physical, interpersonal, and social skills by participating in organized out-of-school contexts. Involvement in these activities also can help youth to develop life skills such as problem solving, time management, goal setting, decision making, and leadership skills.

The value of investing in organized non-academic activities is currently being questioned. Some educators and policy makers continue to assume that activities, like sports and the arts, are just “extras” and are only for fun and recreation. In an era of accountability and fiscal constraints, many schools have limited their resources to those aspects of the curriculum that are mandated as part of No Child Left Behind. It is estimated that in the 2009-2010 year, schools eliminated over 2 billion dollars from their extracurricular and after-school budgets. I strongly believe that making cuts to extracurricular and after-school programming is a misguided, short-sighted, and costly policy decision. These activities only use a small portion of school budgets (1-3%), and serve a large percentage of youth with this money. There is also evidence that after-school programming is cost effective, and spending money now can save money in the future. A cost-benefit analysis of after-school programming in California showed that each dollar invested returns between 8.92 and 12.90 dollars. This is extraordinary one thousand percent return on investment that comes primarily from higher achievement and lower crime rates among youth whom are involved in these activities. With this type of savings, it is hard to argue that these are not dollars well spent.

Some educators have expressed concern that participation in organized activities competes for students’ time and attention and takes away from time that can be spent on school work. There is little evidence to support this fear. Instead the evidence tends to suggest that extracurricular programming may actually help schools in meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind. Several studies have shown that
youth who participate in organized activities have higher grades, higher achievement test scores, greater school engagement, and are more likely to attend college. Furthermore, organized activity participants are less likely to drop-out of school, with the benefits being largest for students who are academically at-risk. The reality is that for some students, the opportunity to participate in organized non-academic contexts is the only reason they come to school, stay in school, and do the work. Cuts to extracurricular programming will be devastating for these youth.

Getting youth involved in organized activities not only increases their educational opportunities, but also can improve their long-term health. The dramatic increase in obesity rates and number of youth developing adult diseases at an early age has heightened the call for solutions to this growing epidemic. Treating these health conditions represents an extraordinary and unsustainable economic and societal burden. To combat these challenges, several governmental agencies have argued that it is necessary to increase opportunities for physical activity in schools during both the school day and after school hours. Unfortunately, many schools have responded to budget constraints and accountability pressures by taking the opposite approach, making significant cuts to both their physical education and after-school programming. This decision has costly public health consequences, as prior research has shown that participation in organized sports reduces body weight, strengthens bones, and maintains cardiovascular health. In addition to improving physical health outcomes, several studies have shown that involvement in sports and other school-based extracurricular contexts can improve mental health. Youth who participate in these activities have higher self-esteem, psychological resiliency, and lower depression rates than youth who are not involved in these contexts. Organized activities also have protective effects; youth in these activities are more likely to postpone sexual activity, have lower rates of juvenile delinquency, and are less likely to smoke and use other illegal substances.

The budget situation has forced schools to make hard choices about how to allocate their limited resources. Some have argued that recreation and community-based activities can help to offset some of the cuts to school-based extracurricular programming. In many under-resourced neighborhoods, youth have few opportunities to participate in organized activities in their communities, and making cuts to school programming would be devastating. Other schools have tried to offset budget cuts by instituting “pay to play” policies, where parents pay for participation, transportation, or equipment costs. Unfortunately, these policies have reduced participation rates, especially among low-income youth. The decrease in participation among these youth is especially troubling because these are the youth who are more likely to live in under-resourced communities with limited organized activities for youth to participate outside of their schools. These youth also get the greatest benefits from participating in school-based extracurricular contexts and can least afford these cuts.

Although cuts to extracurricular and after-school programming may seem like a good solution now, the reality is that down the line these decisions may have repercussions that will be much more costly in the long-term. It is likely that we will have to pay greater costs related to treating childhood obesity, fighting crime, and supporting youth who drop out of school. I strongly encourage educators to broaden the view of education and see these activities as essential to learning and not just “extras”.

* Excerpts of this article were published in Teachers College Records Commentary

Many Connecticut College students recognize the importance of extra-curricular activities for children and youth. They work with OVCS to engage in a variety of partnership projects and programs, both on campus and in the New London community. They build strong positive relationships with the participants and have lots of fun tutoring, dancing, creating art, pursuing sports and exploring the community.
ReaCH: A Spoken Word Piece

by Isaiah General, Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School 8th grader and participant in the Connecticut College OVCS Mentor Program REACH

Reach
Interactive program
An it's something called Reach
Grasping taste of futures
Won't you listen to my speech
Not done
Take a seat, have a sip
Drink the fluid of emotions
That are flowing through my lips.
Reach is on the top
And its getting flyer
Its always looking down
Cause it can't get no higher
Others are getting fast
So Reach got quicker
They can speak all they want
But up there it
Sounds like whispers
You can't reach it
Cause Reach is
Unreachable
These words that I'm praying
Are crazy sick
Unpreachable
Reach
Learn out the truth
Cause this program is a mystery
Won't you see how we feel
Reach isn't just a fantasy
Cause I just made it real

Reach
CALAHE: Connecticut Association of Latinos in Higher Education

by Luis Rodriguez, Connecticut College OVCS

The Connecticut Association of Latinos in Higher Education (CALAHE) met on June 10, 2012 for their 18th Annual Conference to discuss important issues facing the Latino population in the USA. The keynote speaker was Dr. Héctor Cordero-Guzmán, a professor at the School of Public Affairs at CUNY. He shared with us some alarming statistics. Below is a synopsis of his talk.

In 2011 unemployment for Latinos was 11.3% compared with 8.2% of non-hispanics. Latinos have the highest rate of low wage workers and have the highest rate of work related injuries and deaths. 32% of Latino children live in poverty and 47.1% of Latinos have a salary of $20,000 or less. It is clear that these statistics are alarming and we as a society need to work together to find ways to address these issues.

If you ask Cordero to describe Latino growth in the USA, he would respond, “We are spreading” or “We are everywhere” (2012). In his lecture he said that Latinos are the fastest growing population among minority groups in the U.S. In 1950 the population was composed of 89% Caucasians and 3% Latinos. From the 2010 Census data we see that there are 50 million Latinos living in the U.S. (Pew). Cordero said that by the year 2050, there will be close to 200 million Latinos in the U.S. which will account for 29% of the population. Some may think that this is linked to current immigration issues, however Cordero said that Latino immigration has declined and deportation rates have risen. He said Latino growth will continue increasing primarily by birth rates. Statistics have shown that Latinos tend to have children beginning at a younger age and may have more children than some other ethnic groups.

Cordero shared that while there are many factors that can be attributed to these statistics, the low rates of Latino high school graduates attending institutions of higher education and the job market is at the center of the problem. The rates of Latinos entering institutions of higher education and being hired into high skilled jobs is declining. Over 37 million youth, between the ages of 16 and 24 in the U.S. claim they feel discouraged about going to college or getting a job. While this is a national issue across race, 6.6% of this group are Latinos and around 44.1% have less than a high school diploma. He called this group the “disconnected”. When identifying why this disconnection happens, he found out that many have valid reasons such as disability status, lack of a job, are in prison or are enrolled in some sort of intervention program. However, a quarter of these Latino youth, lack of any valid reason except that they feel discouraged.

Cordero went on to discuss that people tend to make assumptions that the “disconnected” youth lack ambition or are involved in drugs, but the statistics show otherwise. When high school seniors were surveyed about use of illicit drugs, Latinos showed to be using 19.9% versus 25.7 of their Caucasian peers. Regarding ambition, 10th grade Latinos were asked about their future plans, 42% said they will attend college and 32% said that “they will graduate with a college degree.” Cordero went on to study when this disconnection happens. Cordero found that 5% happens between 16-17 years old and an outstanding 21% happens between ages 18-19, coinciding with when they are graduating or have graduated from high school. Cordero believes that in order to address these issues, we need to create intuitions that can provide support, guidance and improve communication among existing social groups. We need to advocate to congress, provide training to Latino leaders and develop new ones. We need to build on infrastructure for transformational change where the youth feel encouraged to go to college and step up in the labor force. In order to make improvements, we cannot ignore them. We must work collaboratively to address them.
When I originally began searching for a summer position, my goal was to obtain a summer job where I could genuinely use my mental and physical capabilities and at the same time create a positive and effective impact. As I was informed through several connections around campus, and later by my own research, I realized that an AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associate position with Connecticut College OVCS would not only fulfill my summer goals but would be a perfect opportunity for me.

As some may know, I am from Chicago, IL and I live in Englewood, which is one of Chicago’s neighborhoods that has a high poverty rate. As an inner city youth who faced impoverished circumstances, I have faced many obstacles and circumstances that come with these two markers. I have seen many fall as a result of the biases and limiting infrastructures of poverty. After overcoming the effects of poverty, I have learned that in order to succeed economically and begin to combat poverty, there must be a proper education system. The reason that I state proper is because I was a student in an economically poor school in which I did not receive the full educational benefits compared to students in wealthier schools. This alone was a huge setback for me and I know that it has been a disadvantage to many of my public school classmates. Several have not had the chance to overcome this massively disadvantaging factor.

I understand that not many people had the support that I had to overcome the challenges. I have learned that in order to combat these issues there must be both elements, the support of outside influences as well as an internal self-motivation. I am learning the tactics of combating the continuum of poverty and how to best reduce dropout rates. I want to learn more and to guide other young people to understand that they can accomplish. I want them to know they have college students in their lives who support them. This summer, my priority will be to support the students from New London Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School who participate in the summer collaboration of Camp Rotary. I want them to have additional opportunities and to be able to achieve their fullest potential. I want to play a role in enhancing an educational initiative.

Growing up in poverty has been a powerful learning experience for me. I am thankful to have had the experiences which have taught me much and I am grateful that I have been able to overcome this ethical and economic dilemma. As many of us have learned, life has many obstacles. Yet, I believe that there are many solvable problems in our society. Although, I don’t have the answers to all of the questions, I know that we can work together to get to the solutions. I have ideas about how to work towards solutions but I know that individuals cannot accomplish the mission alone. While researching opportunities that align with my interests in making change, I discovered AmeriCorps VISTA. AmeriCorps VISTA is a national service program designed specifically to fight poverty. I am pleased to have been selected to serve as a member in this organization and to join forces with thousands across the United States to combat economic disparities. AmeriCorps VISTA has made tremendous efforts in fighting poverty and as an AmeriCorps VISTA I know that I will gain substantial and effective knowledge in fighting this problem as well. As I combine my personal efforts with AmeriCorps’ mission, I am excited to see the positive outcomes this summer with the New London middle schools students and for me and my future as well.
The Senior Citizens Prom
A Collaboration of the New London Senior Center, the Holleran Center and OVCS

by Penney Jade Beaubrun
AmeriCorps*VISTA Education Outreach and Student Programs Coordinator

This academic year, the Connecticut College Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy and the Office of Volunteers for Community Service (OVCS) partnered with the City of New London Senior Citizens Center to host a senior citizen’s prom. College students taking part in the PICA certificate program through the Holleran Center worked with the Senior Center site supervisor Elizabeth Witter in order to develop and implement center programming such as completing oral histories. Then the idea of hosting a Senior Citizens Prom at the Center arose. The PICA scholars and the two AmeriCorps VISTAs working in OVCS decided to integrate the PICA scholars’ oral histories at the Senior Prom. There, the seniors would be able to exchange their experiences with the college students.

As an AmeriCorps VISTA, I had the opportunity and support needed to organize the Senior Citizens’ Prom where college students would interact and learn about the Senior citizens life journeys. Tracee Reiser, the Associate Director of the Holleran Center as well as the Director of OVCS, was a huge supporter of the event. I received many non-monetary donations from members of the college community (student life, teachers, staff members, students). There was also the opportunity to be creative and work with what could be found such as spray-painting pine cones that came from the arboretum.

OVCS staff members helped to recruit student volunteers that helped to prepare, set up and clean before and after the prom. Many of the students stayed at the event throughout the night to dance and interact with the senior citizens. James Jackson, a Connecticut College graduate agreed to DJ at the senior prom. The event was beautiful and everyone looked remarkable. The seniors all had positive remarks about the prom and are already looking forward to next year’s prom. One senior exclaimed that she did not know what to expect and that the event was way more than what she imagined. Another senior even shared that she never attended her senior prom and that being part of such an event meant a lot to her.

The Connecticut College Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy and the Office of Volunteers for Community Service are excited that everyone had an enjoyable time and are already looking forward to strengthen their partnership with the New London Senior Center.
While at Connecticut College, I majored in Human Development, minored in dance and completed a rigorous certificate program through the Tours Cummings Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts (CISLA). In the Fall of 2008, I worked with OVCS staff to implement the Advocating Better Choices (ABC) Mentor Program. In the program, I worked with a Haitian student in English and math and completed group activities designed to improve healthy choices and behaviors. In 2009, while studying abroad in Nantes, I completed a teaching internship with French children. From that point on, I have enthusiastically explored and expanded my interests in the public service sector.

My senior year of college, I began working with local Haitian youth at New London High School where I provided specialized tutorial services and mentoring. This educational work with Haitian groups deepened my understanding and commitment to be engaged in the local community while being a student at Conn. Due to such interactions, I was able to complete a study titled “Analyzing the Systematic Barriers that Affect Haitian Residents”.

After graduating from Connecticut College, I was selected to be an AmeriCorps VISTA with Connecticut College OVCS. I knew it was a great opportunity for me to make a positive impact in the New London community while acquiring excellent skills and experience.

As the education Outreach and Student Programs coordinator, I oversaw the tutorial programs (America Reads Challenge) in all of the public schools and afterschool programs in New London. The America Reads Challenge is part of a national strategy to guarantee the independent reading of each student at their age level or higher. I also facilitated the Recreational and Educational Achievement for Children (REACH) Mentor Program which OVCS aims to improve the academic standing of participants.
The mentor program focuses on educating participants to develop social and behavioral skills for personal and professional success; integrating students into the college campus and fostering the pursuit of higher education and enhancing healthy choice awareness among participants.

Connecticut College Office of Volunteers for Community Service (OVCS) partnered with Mitchell College and New London High School to implement a new pilot program this year. The AVID Program is an elementary through post-secondary college readiness system that focuses on the development of the whole student, while also working to increase graduation rates. The AVID program is an excellent opportunity for college students to be catalysts for social change and great role models within our community.

I enjoy working with individuals, trying to understand where they are coming from, meeting them where they are, and guiding them to move forward. I have had the opportunity to work with a range of non-profits and schools and develop collaborative relationships. As I complete my AmeriCorps VISTA placement this year, I continue to find great purpose, satisfaction and passion in community learning and service oriented work. I want to help advance communities while building more inclusive and diverse environments. Becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA was the best decision that I have made thus far. Working for OVCS has been life changing and has prepared me for what life has in store. I gained practical experience while in college and knew for a fact that this position would be perfect for me. In a few years, I see myself working with other activists and policy makers in an NGO and engaging in the lifelong work of building strong and thriving communities.

PENNEY JADE WITH A PARTICIPANT FROM THE BENNIE DOVER JACKSON MIDDLE SCHOOL WHO’S A PARTICIPANT IN THE REACH MENTOR
Expressing Life Through Poetry for New London Youth

by Anthony Sis ‘14 and Asia Calcagno ‘14

Throughout the second semester of their sophomore year, Asia Calcagno ‘14 and Anthony Sis ‘14 (both members/executive board members of RefleXion), were given the amazing opportunity to create a spoken word poetry group with students from New London High School and the Science and Technology Magnet High School. The idea of a poetry club traces back to an interaction with a freshman NLHS student. This student was excited and willing to share her pieces of poetry with Anthony at the end of an AVID session one morning. He asked the student if a poetry/spoken word group existed at the high school and her answer was no. As a result, Anthony asked Asia if she would be willing to work with him in launching the group for high school students. Within a few meetings between OVCS and the Science and Technology Magnet High School, both students received approval by the institutions to coordinate the program at the Student Center of the Science and Technology Magnet High School.

The program was held every Thursday from 2:30-4:00 PM. At the start of each meeting Anthony and Asia checked in with the students about how their week was going. They then engaged in writing and performance exercises with the high school students to get their creative juices flowing. These exercises consisted of friendly competitions such as who could create the best metaphor, simile or imagery through poetry. They would also place students in separate groups and create interesting “human statues” where students worked together to create an image of a word such as “power” with their bodies (pictured here).

Over the semester the two would also provide the students with a series of different poems by published poets to read aloud. This would be followed by discussions about the author’s writing style, word choice, structure, and syntax. Students deconstructed the poem for universal meaning and clarity by sharing what stood out to them personally in these writings. Some of the poems read were “When Girls Called” by Sam Pierstorff and “My Name’s Not Rodriguez” by Luis J. Rodriguez. Students would also watch videos of poets performing their poetry to see a series of different performance styles. Asia and Anthony also performed for the students in person. This method provided the students with a template that all poetry does not have to be read or performed one way. Students developed their own performance styles throughout the semester.

The meetings concluded with the students participating in a 15-20 minute writing session where students received “challenges”. These challenges included incorporating a number of images, extended metaphor, vivid description, surprising similes, or writing about a certain memory, just to name a few. Each student got up and read their poems in front of the group to foster a greater self-confidence through their writing while Asia and Anthony encouraged the students to give their peers constructive criticism, positive feedback and comments on their writing.

Both Asia and Anthony feel honored to have worked with such creative and passionate students. They have left each workshop amazed with the amount of courage, strength, and stories that the students have willingly shared with them as facilitators. One of the most rewarding moments was when a student told the college students that she had not been able to write poetry since her grandfather passed away over a year ago, but yet she wrote and read aloud a poem during her first meeting with Asia and Anthony. She was so moved with her writing that she had tears in her eyes. Asia and Anthony have found that their work with the students has been helpful academically, critically, emotionally, and spiritually for the students and in their work as facilitators. They look forward to working with their previous students and recruiting new members for the group throughout the 2012-2013 academic year.
Below is a sample from one of the students:

“Because Being Me Is Wrong”

Because being me is wrong
I’ve kept myself in a nutshell
dying for someone to reach out and say
that I’m not going to hell
I cry out when alone
because no one understands me
they’ll never know what to do when I’m hurt
I just get so angry
I like girls
and because I’m a girl it’s wrong
a loud ringing in my ears
as if someone banged a gong
I can’t seem to shake the feeling I get when my mom looks
...at me...
and sees me
and her a strange look of disappointment
and hurt
I am considered one of “them”
those people called “faggot”
but I bleed what you bleed...
“Where after all do universal human rights begin? In small places, closest to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person: The neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. With out concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”

Eleanor Roosevelt
Remarks at the United Nations, March 27, 1958
The OVCS Literary Magazine is published by the Office of Volunteers for Community Service for Connecticut College faculty, staff, and students, and for all members of the Greater New London County Community.

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