A Social Justice Approach to Experiential Learning: The Partners at Learning (PAL) Program

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Cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders… For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority.

(Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*)
Our Framework

- Critical approach to education that questions deficit views, oppression, and focuses on empowering students and their communities through social action.
  - Banks, J.A. & Banks, C.A.
  - Ladson-Billings
  - Delpit
  - Freire
  - Duncan-Andrade
- Analysis of educational policies and their impact on oppressed communities.
  - Darling-Hammond
- The social construction of identity and the rights of linguistic minority children.
  - Nieto
So we ask...

- Who are the students we serve through PAL?
- In what ways does the education system serve them?
- In what ways does the education system oppress them?
- What can we do to promote equity and social justice in our schools and communities?
SDUSD Students Enrolled in AP & IB Courses, by Race/Ethnicity

Source: EdTrust West & San Diego Unified School District
SDUSD Class of 2009: A-G Access and Success by Student Group

Access to (enrollment in) the full “A-G” course sequence:
- English Learners: 67% Access, 33% No Access
- Special Education: 77% Access, 23% No Access
- Economically Disadvantaged: 40% Access, 60% No Access

Access to and success (grades of “C” or higher) in the full “A-G” sequence:
- English Learners: 84% Success, 16% No Success
- Special Education: 90% Success, 10% No Success
- Economically Disadvantaged: 64% Success, 36% No Success

Source: EdTrust West & San Diego Unified School District
Examining demographic data
2009-2010 San Diego County K-12 Enrollment by Ethnicity

- Hispanic or Latino: 44%
- White: 35%
- African American: 6%
- Filipino: 4%
- Pacific Islander: 1%
- American Indian or Alaska Native: 1%
- Two or More Not Reported Races: 1%

Source: California Department of Education
Undergraduates by Ethnicity, Fall quarter, 2010 (UCSD)

- African-American: 2%
- Asian: 44%
- Caucasian: 25%
- Mexican-American: 11%
- Filipino: 4%
- Native-American: 3%
- Latino: 10%
- Other/Undeclared: 10%

Source: UCSD Student Research and Information, Student Affairs
Partners At Learning (PAL) Program Overview

- Service-learning branch of UCSD Education Studies
- Over 500 UCSD students take PAL classes each year
- We contribute over 24,000 hours of mentoring and tutoring to low-income neighborhood schools throughout the county
PAL Goals

• Provide college role models and academic support to under-represented PreK-12 schools and students

• Increase the university presence and resources in traditionally under-represented communities

• Engage UCSD students in meaningful coursework and fieldwork that contribute to their sense of citizenry and community involvement

• Encourage more talented and motivated young adults to care about and become involved in education issues
PAL’s Approach

• Process of increased engagement and awareness
• Academic and service components go hand in hand
  ▫ Tons of Reflection and Dialogue:
    • Journals
    • Assignments
    • Writing
    • Partner/small group talk
• A call for action:
  ▫ Making connections between course academic content, practical experience, and students’ current and future roles in society
PAL Courses

- EDS 131 – PreSchool Tutoring
- EDS 130 – Academic Mentoring (upper elementary)
- EDS 136 – Secondary Tutoring
- EDS 137 – Content Specific Projects (Artsbridge, Military Connected Students)
- EDS 138 – Charter School Tutoring
- EDS 139 – Co-requisite field practicum
PAL Partner Schools

- 40+ schools
- Low income neighborhoods (close to 90% free/reduced lunch)
- Underserved and underrepresented students
- Large populations of English Learners
- Diverse student population
Why take a PAL class?

• Experience working with children and youth of diverse backgrounds

• Learn about schools, education, and society

• Fulfill a graduation requirement

• Get a minor in Education Studies (EDS)

• Engage in meaningful coursework and fieldwork that contribute to a more equitable society and world
General Course Topics

- Overview of schools and policies
- Specific subject area focus
- Inclusion
- English Learners
- Role of Family
- Learning Theories
- Language
- Culture
- Schools and Society
- Identity and Development
- Teaching for/Working for Social Justice
Education Studies Program UC San Diego

- Education Studies Minor
- M.Ed. /Single Subject and Multiple Subject Credentials
- M.A. in Teaching and Learning
- M.A. ASL-English Bilingual Education
- Ed.D. in Teaching and Learning
- Ed.D. in Educational Leadership
We are a nation founded upon citizenship and participation in community life. We have always believed that individuals can and should serve.

It is crucial that service toward the common good be combined with reflective learning to assure that service programs of high quality can be created and sustained over time, and to help individuals appreciate how service can be a significant and ongoing part of life. Service, combined with learning adds value to each and transforms both.

Those who serve and those who are served are thus able to develop the informed judgment, imagination and skills that lead to greater capacity to contribute to the common good.

National Society for Internships and Experiential Learning