

The
Urban Initiative
QUARTERLY NEWS UPDATE
gsep.pepperdine.edu/urban-initiative



Building Knowledge, Inspiring Service, Creating Change

Fall 2009

From the *Director's Desk*



SOUTH LOS ANGELES has a population of approximately 885,000 residents—61 percent Hispanic and 31 percent

African American—comprising nearly 10 percent of the population of Los Angeles County. This 60-square-mile area consists of many neighborhoods, some more neglected than others. Many families residing in South Los Angeles suffer when it comes to health care, education, employment and income, crime and incarceration, and homeownership. In addition, families living in this urban environment report high levels of victimization, including sexual assault, childhood abuses, and domestic violence.

That is where we come in. The GSEP Urban Initiative (UI) is committed to serving the South Los Angeles community with psychological and educational services. GSEP students are placed in schools and nonprofit organizations in underserved areas through student-teaching positions and practicum. During their training students become acquainted with the cross-cultural issues and complexities of urban life and apply

the lessons they have learned in the classroom to the field. We also guide our students to navigate community systems such as schools, courts, child welfare agencies, welfare departments, hospitals, and other health care agencies. But, most importantly, we teach our students to become empowered to work in unfamiliar territory, so that they in turn may empower the communities.

The seven marriage and family therapy students, seven student teachers, and two doctoral psychology students that participated in the inaugural Urban Fellows training program have all expressed an energetic interest to continue to work in the underserved South Los Angeles area in the years after their graduation from GSEP. We look forward to watching this first set of Fellows entrench themselves in this dynamic community and serve its residents in a professional rather than student capacity. Time will tell if our training methods were effective at arming our students for the unique challenges of working in an urban environment, and if the knowledge and skills our students carry with them can uplift the families living there. Once we have assessed the success of this first class of trainees, we will incorporate

any lessons learned into the future implementation of our programs so that we are sure to offer the most

“Through my work in the Urban Initiative, I have ridded myself of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality that I once held. Now I consider my school’s community a second home. I realize that all of my fears were unfounded and it is because of this experience that I plan on continuing to work in the urban school setting after completing my degree, as I have all the tools I need to be an effective and culturally aware educator.”

— Mayanthi Imbuldeniya (MA '09),
alumna of the Urban Fellows program

efficient and beneficial program to create change in Los Angeles, and hopefully one day nationwide.

E-mail urban.initiative@pepperdine.edu to offer your thoughts on the newsletter, share personal stories of how you are contributing to the community, or learn how you can participate in any UI projects.

Warmly,

Rhonda Brinkley-Kennedy
Psy.D., MFT



Gertz-Ressler students walk for the homeless.

Partner Profile: **GERTZ-RESSLER HIGH SCHOOL EXPANDS RELATIONSHIP WITH GSEP**

GSEP originally developed its partnership with Gertz-Ressler High School in Los Angeles, California, around providing mentorship and educational encouragement. Through the Riordan Extreme Leadership Program led by Dr. Anthony Collatos, assistant professor of education at GSEP, the high school students attended a college fair and application workshops; visited college campuses, including Pepperdine; participated in a walk for the homeless; and viewed a documentary about Latino farmers in South Los Angeles, among other activities. The Riordan Extreme Leadership Program focused on providing opportunities for the students to network with successful leaders and appropriate role models.

GSEP is excited to announce that its relationship with Gertz-Ressler, one of 17 charter schools certified by the California Charter Schools Association, is now expanding. Urban Fellows in the marriage and family therapy and doctor of psychology programs will start providing free counseling services on the high school campus this fall. "Many students and their parents are in need of counseling support," said James Waller, principal of Gertz-Ressler. "While the parents are very active with the school, participating in events and volunteering their time, they, like many families, struggle with personal concerns that can affect their children's academic performance. The parents already come to us to discuss their issues, but by having the psychology students, we will have additional resources to offer – people with expertise that the parents can talk to confidentially."

The GSEP psychology students will work with the Gertz-Ressler parents as a part of the Parent Academy Program, which includes workshops such as "Keeping Your Child Motivated, On Task, and On Time," "Understanding Your Teen and Your Parenting Style," and "Helping Teens Discover Their Interests and Future Careers." The hope is that these tactics will further support a student body that is already committed to working hard—in spite of socioeconomic struggles, the 2008 – 2009 Academic Performance Index showed Gertz-Ressler grow from 778 to 827 points. This is a 49-point increase versus the state's 14-point increase, from 741 to 755. Dr. Rhonda Brinkley-Kennedy, director of the Urban Initiative, expressed her admiration for this accomplishment, and her delight in partnering with the school in the capacity of psychology: "The Gertz-Ressler students demonstrate dedication and ambition. We hope that the psychological services we provide will help each high school student cope with any problems they may have and allow for an unimpeded path toward success after graduation." 🌟

NEW INITIATIVES WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

We are pleased to welcome the following to UI.

VILLAGE OF HOPE

Master's students and alumni from the marriage and family therapy program provide counseling services to residents at this transitional living facility in Orange County, California.

HUMAN SERVICES ASSOCIATION

Urban Fellows will provide counseling to southeast Los Angeles County residents at this community-based social services agency.

PLAZA COMMUNITY SERVICES

Supports the mental health needs of the uninsured with individual, couples, family, child, and group therapy, such as women impacted by substance abuse and violence.

EXODUS RECOVERY

Promotes sustained wellness, recovery, healthy living, and community integration through mental health programs focused on responsibility and accountability.

ANIMO LEADERSHIP CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Prepares underrepresented students for higher education by incorporating bilingualism and technology into the curriculum.

SOCIAL JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE

Inspired by the GSEP Diversity Council to promote conversations around integrating social justice in clinical psychology.

To learn more about these and other UI partners, visit: gsep.pepperdine.edu/urban-initiative/initiatives-with-community-partners

Faculty Feature:

DR. DUNCAN WIGG, DIRECTOR OF GSEP COMMUNITY COUNSELING CENTER IN IRVINE

In this period of economic uncertainty, fewer funds are in circulation and cuts are being made to vital community resources. Fortunately for Orange County's homeless, however, Dr. Duncan Wigg, director of the GSEP Community Counseling Center at the Irvine Graduate Campus, has been able to demonstrate to the Healthcare Foundation for Orange County the importance of protecting this vulnerable population.

Wigg recently led a successful effort to secure a significant \$18,000 grant from the organization to support the Counseling Center's partnership with Village of Hope, a transitional housing facility for nearly 200 homeless individuals. Village of Hope opened in 2008 and operates as a part of the Orange County Rescue Mission. The donation will sponsor the Pepperdine University Mental Health Collaborative, enabling additional research, supervision of trainees, and further development of a relationship with Orange County Rescue Mission Health Care Services; the University of California, Irvine Department of Psychiatry; and Pepperdine University to better serve Orange County's homeless.

"This gift is especially generous during our current economic climate," said Wigg. "The six master's students and three alumni from the GSEP marriage and family therapy program working at Village of Hope have already provided more than 850 hours of counseling services over the last academic year, and we look



Dr. Duncan Wigg, third from the left, at Village of Hope.

forward to expanding our mental health resources over time."

With Wigg's guidance, the GSEP therapists-in-training address problems such as domestic intimidation, substance abuse, depression, and anxiety, and even more complex issues such as overcoming the effects of chronic poverty and homelessness as it affects an individual's identity. Students use a multidisciplinary approach to act as client advocates, immersing themselves in the social services and probation systems, assisting clients with regaining custody of their children, helping clients access community resources, coordinating with medical staff and case managers, and negotiating relationships with other residents.

"Our students are trained to speak on behalf of the residents who would otherwise not have a voice," Wigg stated. "Moreover, the services offered are consistent with the new legislation recently signed by Governor Schwarzenegger, which emphasizes the provision of mental health care services to California's underserved." Senate Bill 33

increases the educational requirements of marriage and family therapy programs by 25 percent, mandating additional clinical training with residents living in the margins.

Wigg also noted that the Counseling Center is actively pursuing funding that would provide stipends to students and interns interested in this specialized training. "Hopefully, this modest incentive will give the students the support that makes it feasible for them to continue to serve the residents of Village of Hope and wider Orange County area. It is because of the students that

"It is because of the students that many neglected populations with limited health care access are able to receive treatment and improve their lives." —Dr. Duncan Wigg

many neglected populations with limited health care access are able to receive treatment and improve their lives." And it is because of Wigg championing this cause that this tremendous service will be continued for as long as the need remains.

For more information on the Counseling Center, visit: gsep.pepperdine.edu/clinics/irvine

For more information on Village of Hope, visit: gsep.pepperdine.edu/urban-initiative/initiatives-with-community-partners/village-of-hope/default.htm 🌟



TWO MORE GSEP LEADERS DRAWING IN FUNDING TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

As program director for the Pepperdine Resource Youth Diversion and Education (PRYDE) programs, Dr. Robert Hohenstein oversees the clinical training of and counseling services provided by GSEP students and alumni to youth living in Orange County and the San Gabriel Valley in California. Hohenstein has brought in nearly \$700,000 for these programs from several sponsors.

For more information on PRYDE, visit: gsep.pepperdine.edu/pryde

In addition, Dr. Cary Mitchell, professor of psychology, recently garnered \$20,000 from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to support the Urban Initiative's mental health treatment program at the Hope Gardens Family Center in Sylmar, California. The housing facility allows more than 200 women and children to escape the dangerous streets of Los Angeles' Skid Row.

For more information on Hope Gardens, visit: gsep.pepperdine.edu/urban-initiative/initiatives-with-community-partners/hope-gardens-family-center ✨

NEW CLASS OF URBAN FELLOWS KICKS OFF ACADEMIC YEAR ON STEP FORWARD DAY

The second class of Urban Fellows, members of the Urban Initiative's selective training program, was excited to meet as a group for the first time on September 19 at the Hope Gardens Family Center in Sylmar, California. The Fellows joined with other members of the GSEP family to celebrate Pepperdine University's 21st Step Forward Day, an annual service event in which Pepperdine alumni, students, faculty, and staff step forward to help their neighbors.

This is the third year that GSEP has supported Hope Gardens with a back-to-school event for the K – 12-level children who live with their mothers at this residential facility operated by the Union Rescue Mission. Donors provided children with backpacks filled with school supplies in preparation of the first day of school, and everyone enjoyed arts, crafts, and much laughter. This was a special opportunity for the Urban Fellows to connect with each other and promote the education of these young students. ✨



UPCOMING EVENTS

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS IN LOS ANGELES

November 4, 2009 (6 – 8 p.m.)
West Los Angeles Graduate
Campus, Room 337

Dr. Anthony Collatos, assistant professor of education at GSEP, will discuss how the evolving composition of Los Angeles' communities has impacted relationships between populations and the city's social and economic development. He will be joined by public leaders who will share their personal stories as firsthand witnesses of this dynamic metropolis' changing landscape.

For more information, e-mail:
gsepevents@pepperdine.edu

END-OF-YEAR CELEBRATION

June 2010, West Los Angeles
Graduate Campus

Urban Fellows will reflect on their experiences and lessons learned.

For more information, e-mail:
urban.initiative@pepperdine.edu

2010-2011 URBAN FELLOWS DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS

July 2010

Open to current GSEP students.

For more information, e-mail:
urban.initiative@pepperdine.edu

URBAN INITIATIVE COMMUNITY CONFERENCE

Fall 2010, West Los Angeles
Graduate Campus

Urban Fellows and research team will present their preliminary findings, and experts will speak on various issues affecting urban communities.

For more information, e-mail:
urban.initiative@pepperdine.edu