Community based learning office opens

Holy Cross has added a new office to its ranks: Community-Based Learning. The office is expected to bring new importance to the liberal arts subjects Holy Cross students’ study each day. With nearly 450 students involved, this new hands-on approach to learning is sure to interest and influence the student body in a big way.

The mission of the new office of community-based learning, directed by William Meinhofer, Ph.D., is to identify the needs of non-profit, government, and other community based organizations, and facilitate these needs through the faculty and students help.

Regarding his work at Holy Cross, Meinhofer said that he “is looking to expand the number of organizations in the community that faculty and students can work with and incorporate into their courses.”

The participating students are enrolled in classes where they are learning about issues that are currently affecting these local organizations. The students get to help the organizations in areas where they need support, such as desktop publishing, child care, tutoring high school students, and advocating for basic human rights. In the process, the student receives an unparalleled experience, working in the twixt with professionals and gathering information, allowing them to have valuable out-of-the-classroom experience. At the same time, they will write a comprehensive research paper based on their course and community in a big way.

Both the Sociology and Religious Studies departments have already put this community based learning into practice. Students in Professor Mary Hobgood’s Social Ethics class are joining with Holy Cross’ Welfare Solidarity Project, chaired by Jon Favreau, ‘03, in order to work with the Massachusetts Justice Project, a non-profit group with offices in Worcester. The Massachusetts Justice Project provides legal advocacy for those applying for welfare and other programs offered through the Department of Transitional Assistance. The people these students are directly aiding are often looking to attain housing, food, and emergency assistance due to problems ranging from eviction, hunger, and homelessness.

During the training program that took place on Monday, October 1 from 4 to 6 p.m., sponsored by the Florida, two attorneys from the Massachusetts Justice Program, indicated that “the DTA system is hard to navigate.” Both instructors told the soon-to-be student advocates about the welfare system and that they were to act, in the Worcester welfare office, as a resource, informing those in need to bring attention to the system and asking questions about the diverse applications. The students must also, as Perrigo said, be “watchdogs for the welfare system, making sure that the people in need are getting what they are entitled to.”

Clearly, the students of Holy Cross have strengths to offer. Meinhofer feels that “the faculty and students are not just providing technological support or advocacy for the community, but that the students can learn something from the struggles of people they are helping.”

A good example of this is a partnership Meinhofer is trying to set up between Pernet Family Health Service, located on Millbury Street in Worcester, with the College. “Pernet, Meinhofer said, “provides services for low-income and single parent households.” It is hoped that student can learn something from this organization’s struggles.

Meinhofer feels that a student from the Computer Science department could donate his or her time educating the organization about the technology behind the computers they have, so they can more efficiently use them in the future. HC resources are being used to move the organization towards its goal - further publicizing Pernet’s services - while the students receive invaluable community service opportunities that may lead them to a career in social work.

Meinhofer and the Office of Community Based Learning are new to Holy Cross this year. Last year he completed his doctorate in sociology at Boston College. He worked with numerous community service organizations in Roxbury and Boston providing social services and educational support. With funding from Boston College’s sociology department, he set up a pilot community based learning project that he wrote his dissertation on. His project involved teaching eight organizations how to advocate using the media. All of this was made possible through a news conference he organized with the major Boston TV and print media. He feels that, “a more accurate understanding of usual functioning which previously endured years of bad press was achieved. The media and the public were invited ‘to come and see what the communities were truly like.’

If you would like to learn more about Community Based Learning which previously endured years of bad press was achieved. The media and the public were invited ‘to come and see what the communities were truly like.’

The Crusader welcomes letters from its readers. Submissions must be typed, double-spaced, and not exceed 300 words. Please include your name, address, telephone number, and signature. All submissions may be edited for content, and must be received by the Monday prior to publication. Letters may be mailed, e-mailed, or brought to The Crusader office in Hogan 220.

The Crusader is a non-profit, non-partisan, student publication of the College of the Holy Cross. The Crusader is distributed free of charge to all students, faculty, and employees of the College. For those outside of the College, full year subscriptions may be purchased for $30. Please enclose a check payable to The Crusader and mail to the address above.