Dear Alumni and Friends:

It has been wonderful this year to witness the substantial involvement among our students and faculty within their chosen practitioner communities—educators, law enforcement officers, social workers, and human service professionals. In the School of Education and Social Services, students and faculty participate in meaningful experiential work projects and have been able to deliver ongoing professional training to those in the field.

The first example that comes to mind was our January conference for nearly 100 education students, alumni, and cooperating teachers in Ocala, FL. Education faculty members Dr. Joanne Roberts (Gainesville) and Dr. Alexandra Kanellis (Northeast Florida) were impressed by a webinar on bullying among school children, particularly where children with disabilities are targeted. Thinking of the number of children with autism spectrum disorders in our schools, Drs. Roberts and Kanellis decided to invite to Saint Leo the webinar presenter, Dr. Claudio Cerullo, a veteran educator and founder of the national Teaching Anti-Bullying Inc. Joining Dr. Cerullo as a speaker at what became the Bull’s Eye on Bullying regional conference in Ocala was a former bullying victim, Victoria DiNatale, founder of Standing Victorious. The immediate goal of the conference was to give teachers information and resources they can use to achieve an “anti-bullying classroom” at their schools, and participants said they felt motivated by what they had learned. To wrap up the day, Dr. Denise Skarbek, professor of exceptional student education in graduate education studies, presented an overview of signs for preventing suicide.

From left to right: Daniela Redpath, director of programs and operations at Teaching Anti-Bullying Inc.; Dr. Joanne Roberts of SLU; speaker Dr. Claudio Cerullo; Dr. Denise Skarbek of SLU; speaker Victoria DiNatale; and Dr. Alexandra Kanellis of SLU.
January also brought social work majors at University Campus and at the Adult Education Center beyond the campus boundaries into neighboring communities to assist the Coalition for the Homeless of Pasco County with a census taken every other year. Because it is so difficult for society to get an accurate number of citizens who are homeless, the coalition asks trained volunteers to help with a physical count of the current population. Adult learners Phillip Cole and Drew Mehall, both of whom have internships with the coalition, led groups comprised of other student volunteers and law enforcement officers to conduct interviews with homeless individuals and families. In some cases, interviews were conducted at campsites in the early morning before people left for day-labor jobs that provide at least some income. Community sites and shopping centers were visited later in the morning, and finally another canvass was conducted in early evening to account for anyone who might have been missed. Drew said it was the first time he had worked on the count, and he was unsure at first how the people to be surveyed would perceive the volunteers. “The experience was great, and they appreciated us being there.” Drew’s upcoming internship assignment is to improve the use of a client record software system that is used across multiple agencies in the homeless coalition.

He will make sure agencies make better use of case histories of new and existing clients who are entered into the records. The objective is to ensure that clients are receiving the services intended as they are referred to different agencies within the coalition. It is a matter of follow-through on behalf of clients—seeing to the needs of the whole person, so to speak. By participating in the count, Drew got to see the “whole people” the coalition serves, face-to-face. Phillip offered yet another observation concerning the contribution of volunteers from the Pasco County Sheriff’s Office. The officers came dressed in plain clothes like the other volunteers and were able to direct the census takers to the physical locations where homeless citizens could be found. Without the awareness that law enforcement personnel gain during regular patrols of which local park locations, libraries, shopping centers, and convenience stores are important to homeless citizens, census efforts would be far less productive, and the data collected would be less comprehensive.

Our Department of Public Safety Administration has been able to resume offerings from the Command Officer Management Program, which brings six months of administrative and leadership courses to students already working in police agencies at the rank of lieutenant (sometimes sergeant in smaller departments) or above. The courses prepare students to meet the responsibilities that will be placed on them as they are promoted in their field, and at the same time help agencies and communities enrich the talent pool they will continue to draw from as current leaders retire. Accordingly, the instruction delivered can be shaped to meet a local need, say, if a particular group of students needs practical training in public administration finance and budgeting. The work the students complete may be applied to degree credits, if they choose to pursue one.
Karin May, a retired law enforcement lieutenant assigned to the Office of the Attorney General of Florida, has taken over as administrator of the Command Office Management Program. She works with law enforcement agencies to schedule program offerings and instructors, who come from the Saint Leo faculty (Dr. Phillip Neely is pictured at left). She reports that officer participation groups in two locations are progressing well toward their respective May completion dates. One group of 13 students, mainly from the Manatee County Sheriff’s Office, is currently holding classes in Bradenton, FL. The second group, with 16 students from a variety of municipal police departments including the Norfolk (VA) Police Department in Virginia, is meeting at our Chesapeake Education Office in Virginia. “This is the first time we’ve offered the Command Officer Management Program outside the state of Florida. We are proud of that,” Ms. May says. “We’re working diligently to get the next programs set up, and we will conduct two programs a year from now on.”

Recently in our Human Services Department, Dr. Felicia Wilson of our Marietta (GA) Education Center decided it was time to offer students enrolled in Social Policy for the Human Services (HUS 345) a field trip to Atlanta to visit the Georgia General Assembly (the collective name for the Georgia House of Representatives and the Georgia Senate). The class, Dr. Wilson explains, explores laws, policies, and politics, as well as the influence policies have upon the effectiveness of human services professionals. It made sense to give students a gallery-level view of legislative happenings and the chance to interact with elected officials.

Pictured left to right: Student Allen Adkins; Georgia State Senator Donzella James-District 35; Dr. Felicia Wilson, associate professor of human services; Lt. Governor Casey Cagle; student Yotta Colbert.
Based upon responses from her adult learners, Dr. Wilson is considering making the trip a regular event in the course. Student Allen Adkins, for instance, told Dr. Wilson that he was intrigued to observe just how structured and fast-paced the Senate’s sessions are, and that he is interested in returning. Yotta Colbert acknowledged in her feedback that even though she is from Atlanta, for one reason or another, she had not previously visited the state capitol. She had not actually been aware that as a citizen she could go and watch a session. “I did learn a few things while I was there, and I know I will go back and take my own children,” she wrote. “I think it is helpful to understand the law is not some big scary animal that we cannot connect with, understand, and/or change.”

When we receive information such as this, our belief in the power and importance of lifelong learning is affirmed. I appreciate the work our faculty and students do in their communities. Service is important, not only for learning, but also for personal enrichment.

Best Regards,

Carol G. Walker, Ph.D.
Dean, School of Education and Social Services

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