Regenerative Communities Fellowship Program – Report at a Glance

Fellowship Recruitment – Competitive and Diverse

- The program continues to be immensely popular with Cal Poly Pomona students, and the selection process is highly competitive. In five years of our program, we have received well over 700 Fellowship applications. For the 2016-17 program, we accepted nearly one out of every 10 applicants, receiving 117 applications for 12 Fellowship positions.
- Fellows have represented disciplines in Environmental Design, Science, Engineering, Education, Agriculture, and the College of Letters Arts and Social Sciences.
- Fellows bring diverse backgrounds to the program, including personal experiences with immigration, English as a second language, first-generation college students, and exciting environmental science field work. Full bios for this year’s Fellows will be released in December.

Fellowship Training Program – Empowering Students & Communities

- Since program inception we have focused training of Fellows on a few simple goals
  - We empower Fellows to develop the students’ curiosity about environmental science, based on the assumption that people are naturally curious, and education can either develop or stifle their inclination to ask why and to learn.
  - We challenge Fellows to promote community assets which have been shown to promote healthy development of young people. These include positive support for students from community and family, the valuing of young people, and presence of positive adult role models.
  - We encourage Fellows to adopt a catalyst mentality for supporting community change. This includes instilling awareness of the issues and challenges with stuck/dependent communities as well the opportunities and triggers for regenerative change.
- In 2016-17 we have once again created opportunities for past Fellows to play a role in leadership and facilitation of the training program. This has created opportunities for students to grow their own leadership, as well as provide more effective training for the classroom, drawing upon the direct experience of previous Fellows. Colleen Fisher (Fellow, 2015) has joined us this year to support Fellows in the schools.
The training program has become a model for effectively preparing students to engage communities. Dr. Brown has been invited to speak and write about this program at multiple national conferences and leading universities. Most recently, he spoke at Utah State University about this program in March, 2016.

Classroom Participation – Project-Based Learning at All Grade Levels

- **This program reaches over 800 students on a weekly basis.** Fellows participate in every classroom at Kellogg Polytechnic and Westmont Elementary, including specialized classrooms focused students on the autistic spectrum.
- **Environmental science projects are the foundation of the Fellows’ work in the Classroom.** Our work has supported school initiatives to strengthen science education and standardized testing and other measures demonstrate our short-term progress. Key Findings:
  - At Westmont, **percent of students scoring proficient or advanced have consistently outperformed district averages** since program began, a trend that began due to teacher efforts a few years before. Those that perform below basic expectations has declined over 20% during the same time period.
  - After two years of work at Kellogg Polytechnic, **proficiency rates improved by 6%, and in 2016 exceeded district averages for the first time in recent years.**
- **The Fellowship Program supports new Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) through project-based learning.** The shift to new standards which emphasize goals consistent with our program, such as curiosity, critical thinking, investigation, and presentation, represents an important opportunity. Our Fellows and Westmont Elementary are on the cutting edge of this national shift in elementary education.

Whole Family Activities – Nurturing Support for Students

- **Engaging parents, siblings and other care-givers is an important priority for the Fellowship program.** It is recognized that positive support from family/community networks is essential for a young person’s healthy development. This program seeks to connect classroom activities to home life through the creative engagement of
families. This has proven challenging, given peoples’ time, language barriers, and other challenges, but significant progress has been made since program began.

- **In 2016-17 we have further emphasized parental/caregiver engagement.** As a conscious strategy to strengthen connections we have engaged past and current Fellows in the process of connecting with parents and caregivers at both Westmont and Kellogg. The Program now has 3 Community Engagement Specialists [CES] dedicated to strengthening the capacity of parents to participate more fully in the holistic development of their children. Kellogg, Westmont and a third school where we are working, Ramona Elementary, are made up mainly of very low-income immigrant families with limited experience in U.S. schools. CES place strong emphasis on “doing with” vs. “doing for” in order to build self-confidence and promote greater sustainability of parent initiatives. CES worked with parent leadership at both Westmont and Kellogg to organize their own school-wide family events.
  - Kellogg held a Harvest Festival attended by more than 300 families. Per parent request, 8 Fellows were on hand to assist with various booths that had been designed by the parents.
  - Westmont parents held a *Dia de los Muertos* event attended by some 400 families. Again at the request of parent leadership, CES facilitated the participation of Fellows to help with activities as directed by the parents. This approach represents a dramatic shift from prior events designed and implemented primarily by the Fellows.

- In addition to work on these large school-wide events, CES have spent time in individual conversations with over 50 parents to identify other interests around the development of themselves and their children.
  - At Kellogg, a group of 12 parents, primarily Spanish-speaking, are interested in improving practical English conversation skills. Many have said they want to speak better English in order to remain in direct communication with their children who tend to acculturate much more quickly. As a result, CES are now meeting bi-weekly for English conversation with Kellogg parents.
  - At both Westmont and Ramona, parents have expressed worry that they are unable to help their children with their homework. CES are now building parent teams to take ownership for the organizing of homework initiatives at each school. So far, there are 12 parents at Westmont and 10 parents at Ramona who have stepped forward to work together.
  - At Ramona, parents are also seeking to promote more reading in the home. An all-school “Fiesta de Cuentos” event is now being planned for mid-December where parents will have an opportunity to read out-loud to their children during the school day.
Encouraging pathways to higher education is a key goal of the Fellowship program. Recent studies have highlighted the educational disparity between high-income and low-income Americans, noting that the achievement gap between these groups has grown substantially in recent years. Students in Pomona Unified School District face many of the challenges presented by this gap. Cal Poly Pomona has been a leader in facilitating access for underrepresented groups, and this program contributes to that longstanding University goal.

Field trip experiences to Cal Poly Pomona University are a vital component to our program. Every year of the program, we have brought all students at the school to campus for college experiences. This past spring was no exception, as students from both schools to experience our campus and gain valuable hands-on science experiences. Activities this past spring included garden activities at the Lyle Center, visits to the campus library, the aquaponics and bicycling clubs, and a unique idea developed by the Fellows called the “human library,” where elementary students “checked out” a college student to learn about their pathway to college, their major, and life at the University.