Community Service Learning: Tenth Anniversary Edition

California State University

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# Table of Contents

**THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY**
- Mission and Scope 2
- CSU Map 3

**10 YEARS: AN EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION**
- A Revolution Begins 5
- From Humble Beginnings to Transformative Education 6
- Looking Back on 2005-2006: Inspiration from Innovation and Advancement 9
- Ten Year Highlights 15

**BEYOND CHAMPIONSHIP MOMENTS:**
**COMMITMENT TO PROGRESS AND COLLABORATION**
- Commitment to Access 17
- Commitment to Student Success 21
- Commitment to Emergency Preparedness and Response 22

**PROFILES OF ENGAGEMENT** 27

**CONTACT INFORMATION** back cover
Mission and Scope

The California State University (CSU) is the nation’s largest university system, with 23 campuses and seven off-campus centers, nearly 405,000 students, and 44,000 faculty and staff. The CSU, stretching from Humboldt in the north to San Diego in the south, is renowned for the quality of its teaching and for the job-ready graduates it produces. With its commitment to excellence, diversity, and innovation, the CSU contributes significantly to California communities.

While part of the CSU system, each campus has its own unique identity. CSU campuses range from those in urban settings with student populations of more than 25,000 to those in rural areas with much smaller student populations. All CSU campuses have distinct features and programs but share the same mission—to provide high-quality, affordable higher education to meet the ever-changing needs of California.

The CSU offers more than 1,800 bachelor’s and master’s degree programs in 240 subject areas. Since the CSU began in 1961, it has awarded more than 2 million degrees. The CSU contributes strongly to California’s workforce. The CSU prepares the majority of California teachers and graduates more students in agriculture, communications, health, education, and public administration than all other California universities and colleges combined. In total, the CSU awards approximately half the bachelor’s degrees and a third of the master’s degrees awarded annually in the state.
Beginning in the 1990s, the CSU started to recognize the power of service learning as a vehicle that would meet the state’s changing educational needs while also imparting vital civic skills and knowledge. In the past decade, service learning has become a widely accepted and effective way of enhancing the in-class academic experiences of students with the real-world, out-of-class benefits of serving the community.

A Revolution Begins

In 1997, with CSU student involvement in community service activities at a record level due to such national and state initiatives as President Clinton’s America Reads program and the Governor’s Mentoring Initiative, CSU leaders initiated the coordination of community service programs at the system level.

That March, the CSU hosted the first Colloquium on Community Service Learning, bringing together representatives from each campus to discuss how to support the community service performed by CSU students and to link those experiences to the curriculum. Under the leadership of Tom Ehrlich, CSU Distinguished Scholar, and Jill Murphy, Chancellor’s Office staff, this group developed a strategic plan to promote and to expand the scope of community service learning and community service initiatives. The plan had two key objectives:

- Engage students at each CSU campus in at least one community service-learning experience prior to graduation; and
- Offer a continuum of community service opportunities at each CSU campus including a wide variety of community service-learning experiences, as well as co-curricular community service experiences.

“Service learning links theory with reality. So many of my students come to me and say, ‘Why do I have to study this, what’s the point?’ Service learning answers that question.”

Sally Tannenbaum, professor, Department of Communications, Fresno State
The pioneering strategic plan ignited change. At the CSU Office of the Chancellor, systemwide leaders established the Office of Community Service Learning, the first of its kind in the nation, to provide coordination and leadership among the 23 CSU campuses. The substantive content of the strategic plan served to shift community service from the periphery of the academy to the curriculum. Campuses embraced service learning by providing office infrastructure, focusing on faculty development, and cultivating quality partnerships with the community.

**From Humble Beginnings to Transformative Education**

In 1999-2000, the year that data collection began, 1,000 service-learning courses were offered, enrolling nearly 29,000 students. Those numbers have increased substantially to current levels of 1,800 service-learning courses offered each year, affording 65,000 students, or 16 percent of the CSU student population, the opportunity to participate in service learning.

The year 2000 marked an unprecedented level of commitment to community service learning by government and institution leaders. The CSU Board of Trustees passed a landmark resolution on community service learning and California Governor Gray Davis authorized $2.2 million to support the development of new service-learning courses and infrastructure across the CSU. Funds from this historic allocation enabled every campus to create a service-learning office and appoint a service leader.

During this period, national service and service-learning opportunities continued to grow across the CSU as the Chancellor’s Office was awarded three multi-year grants:

- Service Learning for Family Health AmeriCorps Program (SLFH)
- Institutionalizing Community Service Learning in the CSU (a Learn and Serve America grant)
- Linking Service Learning and the Visual Arts (a J. Paul Getty Trust grant)

In total, the systemwide office secured an additional $2.5 million from federal and private agencies, which enhanced the CSU’s national reputation for leadership and innovation.
Collaborating with national organizations is one example of how the CSU has elevated quality engagement endeavors.

From 2001-2003, in partnership with national Campus Compact and California Campus Compact, the systemwide Office of Community Service Learning offered Engaged Department Institutes to 30 academic departments interested in serving as units of engagement and change by incorporating community service learning into their curricular policies and plans. Drawing from collective experiences, CSU campuses continue to provide workshops on engaged departments, developing and sharing best practices with their colleagues nationally and statewide.

In 2003, the CSU launched a multimillion-dollar civic engagement initiative, Realizing the Civic Mission of Education in the CSU, supported by Learn and Serve America. Over a three-year period, the initiative sought to support long-term institutionalization of service learning and civic engagement. As a result, at many of the most advanced campuses, there has been a sea change in the direction of service-learning programs. This shift is illustrated by changes in the name and mission of their offices. At California State University, Long Beach, for example, the office is now called the Center for Community Engagement. At San Francisco State University, service learning is now a crucial part of the Institute for Civic and Community Engagement.

Looking Back on 2005-2006:
Inspiration from Innovation and Advancement

The 2005-2006 academic year was marked by a series of inventive efforts that broadened community service-learning efforts into new dimensions.

External organizations played a powerful role in underscoring the importance of community engagement in higher education:

- In spring 2006, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning modernized its original classification system for institutions of higher education and introduced the elective classification “community engagement.” Six CSU campuses were selected to be first-round applicants. Since then, they have connected and documented their institutional identities and concrete efforts in four key categories:

“Service learning is learning with meaning. Meaning means retention and adding humanity to facts and figures. Therein lies the value of service and learning.”

Roma Guy, professor, health education, San Francisco State University
Institutional Identity and Culture

Institutional Commitment

Curricular Engagement

Outreach and Partnerships

For the 2005-2006 academic year, 12 CSU campuses were recognized for their commitment to public service, including hurricane relief activities, as part of the inaugural President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

In addition to national attention, the CSU coordinated a number of efforts that produced influential outcomes:

- The first CSU Community-Based Teaching and Research Conference was held for faculty scholars with the goal of strengthening their contribution to community partnerships, promoting civic engagement, and working toward social change. More than 60 presentations demonstrated the effectiveness of community-based research, both as a rigorous way to conduct scholarly work and as a means to present compelling information on social issues.

- More than 60 California college leaders from development, public relations, and community service learning attended The Artful Partnership, a one-day forum sponsored by the CSU and California Campus Compact. During this pioneering event, participants learned how campus units can jointly craft messages about student engagement to donors, alumni, and the general public.

- The CSU conducted new research revealing that those students who work are more involved in community service learning than their nonworking counterparts. In addition, employed students contribute more service hours and perform service in more months of the year.

"[The CSU's] expertise is of great value to the Corporation for National and Community Service and the broader service-learning field; we look forward to continued contributions from your program.”

Amiko Matsumoto, special assistant to David Eisner, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service
The CSU was awarded an $18,000 grant from Best Buy Children’s Foundation and Learn and Serve America to design civic engagement activities that collectively mobilized college students and K-12 youth to work on a community issue that would also honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Three CSU campuses were involved in this important initiative:

- California State Polytechnic University, Pomona students joined with youth from the city of Pomona to document personal stories of nonviolence through various media tools to help discourage recurring crime and gang activity.

- California State University, San Bernardino worked closely with an after-school program to coordinate a series of projects including educational seminars, cultural programs, and one-day service projects.

- California State University, Stanislaus students worked with K-12 youth to create a mural for the King-Kennedy Memorial Center that illustrates their visions and hopes for change in their communities. The goal of the project was to prevent the Center from being a target for gang graffiti.

“I learned so much about myself and how I want to live my life. Working with my service-learning organization was the first time I caught a glimpse of the harsh injustices in our world, and I now know I want to dedicate my time to change them.”

Student, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
Bottom Photo (left to right): Chancellor Charles B. Reed; Armando Gonzalez and Emmy Wang, Cal State Long Beach students; and Dr. F. King Alexander, President, Cal State Long Beach. Cal State Long Beach Interim Provost Dee Abrahamse in the background.
In March 2000, the CSU Board of Trustees passed a landmark resolution ensuring that all CSU students have the opportunity to participate in community service and service learning.

Every year the CSU triples the minimum requirement of Federal Work Study funds designated for community service placements, amounting to nearly $26 million since 1997.

More than 4,500 CSU students have participated in national service programs since 1998, receiving AmeriCorps education awards equaling $5.6 million.

More than 1.2 million CSU students have engaged in a variety of community service-learning activities since 1999.

During the past decade, CSU faculty have taught more than 10,200 service-learning courses.

Partnerships with private foundations and federal agencies have brought $12.8 million in support of community engagement activities to the CSU.

Eighty percent of CSU students have jobs. Each year, in addition to their commitments to work, family, and school, CSU student volunteers contribute millions of hours, both as part of their academic experience and as a university-encouraged service. Their contribution equates to a minimum wage value of $1.3 billion since 1999.
Beyond Championship Moments: Commitment to Progress and Collaboration

The fruit of the CSU’s long-standing commitment to providing students with the most meaningful and valuable education possible can be found in its creative teaching methodologies, diverse learning environments, and reciprocal community-university partnerships that stretch across the state and across the nation. In this spirit, CSU institutions and individuals are deeply invested in community engagement efforts that not only expand students’ minds and skill development, but also equip them to tackle challenging community problems by becoming active participants in community and civic life.

Commitment to Access

Providing preparation for and access to higher education for underserved populations has long been a pillar of the CSU mission. In 2006, Chancellor Charles B. Reed personally took the message of the increasing importance of a college education to communities throughout California. In a speech to African-American leaders in Oakland, he emphasized that, “In the past, college might have been optional. But these days, a college degree is becoming the minimum requirement for getting a good job and succeeding in the workforce. We’re living in a knowledge-driven economy, where businesses want workers who understand technology, who know how to think and communicate globally.”

Through service learning, CSU campuses are already playing an important role in preparing and mentoring college-bound students:

- With funding from the California Department of Education, the CSU Bakersfield Center for Community Partnerships and Service Learning has launched Project Connect, an after-school program that targets fourth through eighth graders at nine local schools that are currently underperforming on state academic testing. Students in the program are provided tutoring assistance along with enrichment activities such as music, dance, drama, pep squad, athletics, and art.

“We have been trying to blur the line where the campus ends and the community begins. With the help of service-learning classes and activities, it’s been possible.”

Dr. J. Michael Ortiz, president, Cal Poly Pomona
The Students for the Advancement of Global Entrepreneurship (SAGE) program, initiated at California State University, Chico, aims to advance entrepreneurship education and community service learning across the world, emphasizing ethical business practices, social responsibility, civic engagement, and environmental awareness. SAGE sponsors teams of high school students who complete real-world projects for the betterment of their communities under the direction and advice of university students. During the annual SAGE Tournament, high school students present their project results to a panel of community leaders. SAGE is now an international network and, in 2005-2006, approximately 200 high schools from around the world participated.

At California State University, Fresno, the Turning Points Academy brings approximately 150 high school sophomores to the university setting for one semester each year. The student curriculum consists of four academic high school courses as well as two or more university classes such as kinesiology. Service-learning students in drama courses work directly with the high school students to develop theater and music pieces. The partnership was designed specifically for the inner-city “at-risk” student, with the goal of encouraging students who may not otherwise have considered college an option.

Launched in September 2000, Long Beach BLAST—Better Learning After School Today—recruits college volunteers and service learners from Cal State Long Beach, Long Beach City College, and California State University, Dominguez Hills to improve learning in after-school programs. To date, over 1,600 skilled and caring volunteers have been placed with students in grade levels K-8 to provide one-on-one tutoring and homework assistance. Other student volunteers bring rich lesson plans in technology, science, and the arts. Volunteers function as role models for the possibility of higher education and/or careers.

Cal State San Bernardino runs the GEAR UP Inland Empire program designed to increase the number of low-income students who enter and succeed in postsecondary education. CSUSB service-learning students provide tutoring and mentoring to help seventh- and eighth-grade students better understand coursework that prepares them to succeed in high school and go on to college. GEAR UP, which includes such organized activities as dance, drama, and leadership training, also provides parental support programs.
Commitment to Student Success

As the most diverse higher education system in the nation, the CSU offers enriching but practical experiences to its students once they have been admitted to college. Community service-learning projects play a vital role in supporting the academic and personal success of a growing proportion of the system’s 405,000 students. Through such initiatives as the Institute for Civic Learning and First Year Experience, the CSU is transforming educational practices and approaches as it finds new and better ways to ensure student success.

Institute on Civic Learning and the First Year Experience

Community service learning and first-year experience programs have common goals—encouraging interactive teaching strategies to advance institutional approaches to student development, and to create engaged and motivated students. When these two powerful, yet largely unconnected movements first converged, they shaped what would become another common goal—to transcend existing educational practices.

In June 2006, the CSU Office of the Chancellor hosted an Institute on Civic Learning and the First Year Experience. CSU teams from 11 campuses interested in making civic skills, knowledge, and values a contributing part of their first-year programs came together for two and a half days to develop implementation plans for a new approach to the first-year experience. The participating campuses, embracing the premise that civic engagement is a valuable way to achieve first-year objectives, grappled with one of the academy’s big questions: is civic engagement a distraction from more important first-year work, or is it a valuable way to achieve key objectives? And how can outcomes in the first year lead to continued and progressive outcomes in subsequent years?

Campus teams will spend the next year seeking ways to help students integrate their work inside and outside the classroom.

"Now that I have been exposed to all these realities, I really feel the need to keep educating myself about the current issues and the ways in which I can help make a difference."

Student, enrolled in course: Introduction to Service in Multicultural Communities, CSU Monterey Bay
The Connections Program at CSU Chico

Designed at the Chancellor’s Office Civic Learning Institute, CSU Chico’s Connections program will bring together faculty from various disciplines to modify the freshman seminar course UNIV 101. The aim is:

- to provide students, early on, with a variety of disciplinary perspectives;
- to help them form personal and academic ties with faculty; and
- to encourage them to engage in out-of-the-classroom activities that reinforce learning.

The program will also include linked courses shown to contribute to persistence and to academic success, as well as an innovative advising program in which students will be encouraged to reflect on their experiences and establish academic goals.

Sonoma SERVES

More than 100 Sonoma State University students enroll each year as full-time AmeriCorps members with the Sonoma SERVES program, acting as mentors to youth in community schools. In conjunction with Sonoma SERVES staff, School of Education and Hutchins School of Liberal Studies professors are implementing the Year of Service experience. Students take courses that support their service work, allow them to build on their learning, and provide opportunities for reflection. In addition to receiving 24 units of credit, students receive the benefits of AmeriCorps membership (living allowance, scholarship, health insurance, and loan deferment).

Commitment to Emergency Preparedness and Response

Out of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and the Gulf Coast Hurricanes of 2005 has come a new consciousness of the need for community preparedness for any disaster, natural or man-made. The CSU has many experts in the field and has embraced initiatives to prepare California and the nation to respond to any emergency. Service learning plays an important role.
Hurricane Katrina Response

In October, Humboldt State University was recognized for distinguished community service in aiding hurricane victims along the Gulf Coast by being selected for the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll with Distinction for Hurricane Relief Service.

In response to Hurricane Katrina, campus and community members joined to aid families relocated to Humboldt County. In addition, the new campus club “Books Building Bridges” contributed more than 1,400 hours of service collecting, purchasing, organizing, and delivering tons of books to three schools; raised $4,000; and participated in two alternative break trips to the Gulf region. Club members filmed footage for a documentary and developed a blog exchange with one of the partner schools. A featured political science course, Katrina Politics, was offered in fall 2006.

Disaster Mitigation

The engineering program at San José State University is the home of the Collaborative for Disaster Mitigation (CDM), a unique public-private-academic partnership to reduce the impact of disasters by focusing on hazard mitigation. Through CDM, San José State faculty and service learners have been actively involved in several hazard mitigation projects including the publication of the Homeowner’s Guide to Earthquake Safety, available in both English and Spanish.

Bioterrorism and Disaster Preparedness

At Cal State Long Beach, the Bioterrorism and Disaster Preparedness Curriculum Project is developing a culturally relevant curriculum that will be used to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to recognize, treat, and report on instances of terrorism or other public health emergencies. Psychology students enrolled in a service-learning course are also trained in how to provide crisis counseling to schoolchildren in the event of an emergency.

Disaster Response Web Portal

During the past year, the California Service Corps, in partnership with the CSU and a number of statewide organizations, has developed a matching network to connect interested Californians with local volunteer opportunities. One of the key components is timely information on how volunteers can assist communities most affected by a major disaster. California State University, Northridge will become one of the hub sites in this important network.

“Throughout the school year, students from San José State’s service-learning program demonstrated their understanding and commitment to the essential values of cross-cultural interaction with our multiethnic school community.”

Adam Escoto, principal, Horace Mann School
Cal State Bakersfield
This past year, 125 Cal State Bakersfield students who are prospective teachers acquired skills and knowledge through practicum teaching in 30 elementary school classrooms through the university’s Children’s Art Institute (CAI). Launched in spring 2006, the Institute provides much-needed visual arts education during the academic year and summer months to elementary-aged children in the greater Kern County school system where arts education is not offered.

CSU Channel Islands
To better understand the diverse perspectives and issues impacting people engaged in economic struggle, service-learning students enrolled in an interdisciplinary sociology/English course studied a selection of narratives about the working poor and working class. With translation services provided by service learners in Spanish 304, students conducted ethnographic interviewing of individuals who recently moved into farm-worker and affordable housing supported by Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation.

CSU Chico
Community Action Volunteers in Education (CAVE) is the largest student-run organization on the CSU Chico campus, offering more than 20 volunteer programs serving children, the elderly, adult nonreaders, special populations, and more. More than 27,000 student participants have contributed an estimated $12 million in volunteer time to the region in the past 15 years.

CSU Dominguez Hills
The service-learning office helped incorporate civic engagement as a core area proposed in the campus accreditation review, with the aim of moving the campus toward civic engagement as a central constituent of the campus mission and integral to its academic programs.
**Cal State East Bay**

In an effort to organize community partners as self-advocates on campus and as a professional network among themselves, the service-learning program hosted a retreat for 15 community partners to learn more about engaging students (volunteers, course-based service learning, interns), strategies for strengthening community-university partnerships, and ideas for short-term projects that both benefit the agency and meet learning outcomes.

**Fresno State**

For the third year in a row, Fresno State has been designated by California Campus Compact as a regional center for student civic engagement and sponsored a regional conference for 30 college students who learned how to organize K-12 students to become engaged in service to their communities.

**Cal State Fullerton**

Jumpstart students at Cal State Fullerton assisted preschool children in Head Start, a comprehensive child development program, to strengthen their language development and reading skills. The service learners’ early childhood education classes also helped them to recognize developmentally appropriate key experiences to apply in observation, support, and activity planning.

**Humboldt State University**

The Service-Learning Fellows Program helped keep faculty current with service-learning theory and teaching methods. An online collaboration site enabled the group to use “Just-in-Time” teaching and learning as a way to make and discuss assignments, to share information with the group, and to collaborate with faculty fellows from each of the colleges on campus.
Cal State Long Beach

Through a comprehensive strategic planning process, a planning team involving faculty, staff, students, and community partners produced a bold new mission and plan, including a new name for the office—Center for Community Engagement. Five initiatives were developed to reflect the service constituencies for Cal State Long Beach: business alliance, education alliance, nonprofit alliance, peace and justice alliance, and student alliance.

Cal State L.A.

For her class on Chicano educational issues, Sophia Viscarro-Estrada mentored middle school students struggling with their studies. Her college education, and especially her Chicano studies class, helped her understand, connect with, and inspire the students who looked up to her because she came from a similar background, overcame her obstacles, and was able to go to college.

California Maritime Academy

Cal Maritime’s third annual Community Partner Fair was one of the best on record. Colorful tents and bunting greeted 15 community partners who came to meet students and faculty for two hours of lively interaction. Many students preparing for their fall service-learning assignments made arrangements to work with prospective agencies, whose representatives were elated at the response.

CSU Monterey Bay

Business students worked with LUPE (La Unión del Pueblo Entero) to create a coffee shop in an after-school center in East Salinas. The coffee shop, to be run by youth from LUPE, is intended to create a safe space for Salinas teens to hang out. The business students helped with business and marketing plans for the enterprise.
Cal State Northridge

The Student Service-Learning Scholars program provided $1,000 scholarships to 14 student scholars who assisted sponsoring faculty members with logistic and academic tasks associated with their service-learning classes. Student scholars attended leadership classes to learn life and service-related skill, planned a civic engagement project, and helped plan the Campus and Community Connections Conference, where each facilitated a workshop.

Sacramento State

As part of Sacramento State’s efforts to build stronger relationships, the university has begun a series of breakfast meetings for students, faculty, and campus and community members. The informal setting allows faculty to share strategies on alternative teaching activities that take place outside the classroom and still expand students’ learning. One benefit has been greater collegiality across disciplines and between individuals in a variety of positions.

Cal Poly Pomona

The Raise Your Voice Campaign consisted of four student-run events. A civil rights discussion drew 80 students, staff, and faculty; a volunteer fair matched local groups with volunteers; a campus cafe night encouraging artistic expression of engagement attracted more than 40 students; and campus debates centered on society’s double standards.

Cal State San Bernardino

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program significantly expanded to serve seven sites in four Inland Empire cities. CSUSB students helped some 2,300 low-income residents to complete tax returns totaling over $20 million in adjusted gross income. Residents will receive over $1 million in tax refunds due to the students’ 6,500 service hours.

“My experience shows me how important the service-learning connection is to the university, to the students, and to community organizations. These opportunities assist me in accomplishing my goals as a professor: to help students learn from books, people, and real-life problems and to offer solutions.”

Valerie Talavera-Bustillos, professor, Chicano studies, CSU Los Angeles
San Diego State University

In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, the Center developed an Alternative Spring Break trip to New Orleans. Participating students restored a university office, gutted homes in the Ninth Ward, and provided many of the hurricane victims with support. This experience was emotional and eye-opening for the students and motivated them to engage in future civic engagement activities.

San Francisco State University

Urban Curriculum/Scholars courses provide university-level instruction tailored to community-based organization staff, arrange community placements for university students, and create leadership seminars that provide an ongoing context for community and institutional collaboration. Informed by a historical perspective on current urban issues affecting the city’s diverse communities, students in the Politics of San Francisco course discuss solutions with city officials, community leaders, and faculty.

San José State University

A partnership with the Digital Clubhouse Network links students from history, nutrition, instructional technology, and management information systems with war veterans to create digital movies of their “Stories of Service.” The partners will model this project for the History Channel and the county Office of Education at a summer seminar.

Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

In the third annual Poly House project, Cal Poly students renovated a local home in just two weekends as part of their technological project management class. Supported by Central Coast businesses, the project let students help the local community while applying technical planning and management techniques learned in class.
**Cal State San Marcos**

The Outstanding Community Partner Award went to Girls, Inc. for helping to create a video for teenage girls about prevention of date rape and abuse from boyfriends. Service-learning students taking an entry-level video course worked with Girls, Inc. to conceptualize, script, shoot, and edit the video, “Safe in My World,” which will be shown at community forums, symposiums on safety, and other special screenings.

**Sonoma State University**

Students in a statistical consulting class partnered with the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women to collect and interpret data on issues including education, health care, employment, crime, homelessness, demographics, and home ownership. Like real consultants, students presented their findings to the county in professional PowerPoint presentations.

**Cal State Stanislaus**

A project in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., joined CSU Stanislaus, four Modesto municipal agencies, and a local artist in facilitating school and university students to create the mural “Build the Dream.” The unique project, reflecting King’s values of constructive community growth, involved students in using the arts both to beautify and to discourage graffiti.