

together

EXPLORING WHAT CAN BE

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Social Sciences

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JUSTICE

[juhs-tis] –noun

the quality of being just, impartial or fair

1. the principle or ideal of just dealing or right action
2. conformity to this principle or ideal: righteousness
3. the moral principle determining just conduct



SHEILA BIENENFELD

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JUSTICE

dean's message

Greetings!

I am delighted to share with you this inaugural issue of *Together*, the newsletter of the College of Social Sciences. In this issue, roughly organized around the theme of "Justice," we highlight some of the social and legal justice activities of our faculty, students and alumni. To put it bluntly, we brag a little about some of the extraordinary work being done by current, former and future members of the CoSS community.

There are a couple of reasons why I feel like bragging. There's the simple matter of pride: I am deeply proud of the work you'll read about in *Together*, and I want to support that work by highlighting and sharing it widely. And, in difficult times it helps to remember

that what we do matters—that we make a difference, and indeed, the difference we make often has wide and lasting impact.

In that vein, you'll read about two of our alumni, both attorneys: one is the first woman of Vietnamese descent to be appointed to the bench in Northern California and the other, a first-generation college graduate of Mexican-American heritage, prosecutes environmental law violators. We also profile the CommUniverCity project; a groundbreaking social justice partnership between San José State University, the city of San José, and the nearby Five Wounds-Brookwood Terrace neighborhood.

We'll meet a student activist stirred by the environmental racism he witnessed in his native New Orleans. You'll learn about our four newly hired full-time faculty members, each of whom, in his or her way, is involved in work that exemplifies the best of the social sciences. The people profiled in this

issue of *Together* represent only a small part of our community. Look to future issues for more profiles and examples of the excellent work coming out of CoSS.

A short note about our newsletter's name: *Together*. We considered many titles but finally settled on *Together* because we *are* together—together on our planet, in our country and community, and with our friends and families. Human behavior when we are "together" with one another comprises much of what we social scientists study.

Finally, I hope that this newsletter will bring together many of us who share a connection to SJSU and its College of Social Sciences. I look forward to hearing from you with ideas for future stories and feedback about our newsletter and the work it showcases.

Sheila Bienenfeld
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Fields of dreams

Oral historian chronicles migrant civil rights movement

Margo McBane led two lives in the early 1970s, dividing her time between studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and working at the United Farm Workers of America boycott house in San José.

As she got to know some of the older migrant workers, she started interviewing them about their experience, taking care to record it all on tape. She could hardly have known she was laying the groundwork for a lifelong love affair with Chicano oral history.

McBane, now a lecturer in the College of Social Sciences at San José State University, earlier this year received a \$40,000 planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a traveling exhibit called, "Before Silicon Valley: A Migrant Path to Mexican American Civil Rights."

The exhibit, which focuses on the experience of migrant workers in northern California between 1920 and 1960, will include a "living history character" portraying a female cannery worker, an online component and a booklet. It has already been booked into 32 sites around the country, McBane says.

The next step will be to secure a larger implementation grant to complete the project, she says.

In her career as a public historian, McBane has taught high school history, worked in cultural resource management and produced public radio documentaries. She received grants from the California Council in the Humanities and the Kellogg Foundation to produce an award-winning two-part radio program called "Talkin' Farmwork Blues: An Oral History of California Farm Labor."

In 2005, when KB Homes was preparing to tear down the old Del Monte cannery in San José, History San José hired McBane to produce an online documentary called "Cannery Life," which included interviews, photos and videos with 15 former cannery workers who shared their experiences.

McBane meanwhile was contemplating San José's unique role as a cultural center for Mexican immigrant workers in northern California, as well as east side San José resident Cesar Chavez's role in co-founding the United Farm Workers. In the 1950s Chavez learned the art of community organizing from Fred Ross, who had trained in Chicago with Saul Alinsky, McBane says.

One day, McBane had a brainstorm. "I called the NEH and pitched that San José was the Birmingham of Mexican American civil rights," she says. That led to her successful exhibit application.

The grant will help pay for McBane and her students to conduct a handful of interviews of the surviving pivotal players in the Chicano farm worker rights movement. A few interviews have been completed, but she would like to complete another six to eight.

"Labor doesn't have much written about it from the worker perspective," McBane says. "This is the history that hasn't been told." 🗣️



Good neighbors

CommUniverCity's commitment to Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace

The Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace area of San José once was home to dairy farms, as well as some of the city's oldest neighborhoods and a thriving Portuguese immigrant community.

But half a century ago some sections fell on hard times as developers bought up the farms, longtime residents fled to the suburbs and urban decay set in. Now the area is home to recent immigrants, many of whom feel isolated even though they live in the nation's 10th largest city.

Dayana Salazar sees the community of 22,000 lying to the east of the San José State University campus as a kind of laboratory for her urban planning students. Here, they have an unparalleled opportunity to gain practical experience as they collaborate with residents who are working to shape their neighborhood's future.

"We realized the best way to train planners, the best way to work with diverse constituencies and underserved residents, is to have them involved in real planning processes with a real client," says Salazar, a professor of urban planning in the College of Social Sciences.

That realization was formalized in 2005, when the university and the city of San José created CommUniverCity, a partnership that seeks to revitalize neighborhoods like Five Wounds/Brook-

wood Terrace by empowering residents and giving them direct access to city government.

"It was really years in the making," says Salazar, who also serves as CommUniverCity's executive director. "It's almost as if you have a perfect alignment of planets and stars."

Over the past six years, dozens of university faculty and some 7,000 students have contributed their time and expertise, Salazar says. Meanwhile, CommUniverCity has formed partnerships with at least 50 nonprofit organizations and helped neighbors identify needed improvements in basic infrastructure while planning for future development.

For example, she says, local residents worked with student volunteers to develop an urban village plan in anticipation of the day that BART extends service to their neighborhood, which lies along U.S. Highway 101, Salazar says.

Local people rejected a large parking structure that had been envisioned by BART planners for the transit hub. "They said, 'We want to turn this into a village with a town square,'" Salazar says.

Salazar, who grew up in Colombia, was practicing as an architect in Bogotá when she realized she had missed her true calling. "I was interested in how buildings came together to form public spaces and cities," she says. She went on to earn a master's degree in urban planning and design at the University of Cincinnati before starting at San José State in 1991.

Salazar and her colleagues wanted their students to master what they call "a collaborative neighborhood planning process"

in which they would learn to hone their professional skills by listening to what local residents wanted, rather than telling them what to do.

That philosophy was aligned with the city's evolving neighborhood revitalization strategy, which called for identifying leaders in the community who could serve as liaisons with City Hall, she says.

By the early 2000s Salazar and other university faculty were discussing how to improve the students' service learning experience while extending the connections between the campus and the surrounding community. "Everybody could potentially win in this situation," she says.

Salazar credits Susan Meyers, former dean of the Connie L. Lurie College of Education, with using her "formidable" leadership skills and connections to bring together likeminded professors and city officials.

In helping to get CommUniverCity off the ground, Salazar and Meyers approached a colleague from the College of Social Sciences named Terry Christensen. A longtime professor of political science specializing in state and local politics, Christensen had been sending students out into the neighborhoods to conduct voter registration projects.

Salazar, Christensen and other university faculty met with Paul Pereira, neighborhood team manager with the city's Strong Neighborhoods Initiative, who suggested that the new program focus on Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace.

It fell to Christensen, who lived just a block from the neighborhood boundary, to serve as part-time executive director for the first two and a half years of CommUniverCity's existence. "When I thought about it, it really brought together a lot of things I had been interested in personally and professionally for a long time," he says. "My main job for those first years was just getting it up and running structurally."

Part of the job involved doing some external fundraising (although he credits Salazar, who succeeded him, with "exponentially" increasing the infusion of outside funding). "It's a pretty low-cost program," says Christensen, who adds that the university pays for the part-time executive director position. "Most of it just works by the blood, sweat and tears of the faculty members and the students," he says.

Christensen, who came to San José State four decades ago after earning his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina, is just a year away from retirement, but he has remained involved with the project.

Some of his political science students worked to organize the community, Christensen says, while others have rolled up their

sleeves and tackled projects like the cleanup of a railroad right-of-way that runs through the area and has been designated for redevelopment into a recreational trail.

"Almost universally they like it," he says. "They like working with the residents. They also like being off campus with each other, outside, being part of an academic community."

Pereira says that before CommUniverCity was launched, San José State professors individually sent their students out into the neighborhoods for fieldwork. But after a semester or two the students would leave, taking their newfound knowledge with them. "They were all over the place," he says. "It was hard for the professors to gain the trust of the community."

Because of CommUniverCity's ongoing community presence, it has been easier to track its accomplishments over time and bring projects to fruition, Pereira says.

The projects themselves have become increasingly ambitious. Recently, a group of health science students collaborated with management information systems students and urban planning students with expertise in geographic information systems (GIS) to study and map how the built environment affects the health of residents, he says.


Meanwhile, when neighbors complained about daily traffic tie-ups at an intersection at 33d Street and McKee Road, engineers from the city and CalTrans estimated it would cost \$7 million to acquire land and rebuild the traffic lanes, Pereira says.

San José State urban planning and engineering students did some research and proposed a cheaper alternative that involved changing the stoplight timing. The work cost \$7,000 and eliminated most of the traffic jams, Pereira says. "They're saving the city and groups money by thinking of things differently," he says.

Salazar has come to see that the key to CommUniverCity's success is community involvement. "You have to be relentless in your outreach," she says. "We have pretty much infiltrated CommUniverCity in all kinds of sectors."

Contacts are made through churches, neighborhood associations and schools, she says. "When it's needed, we even go door to door and go to people's living rooms and have discussions at that level," she says.

This fall, CommUniverCity will contact some 300 residents who participated in a 2006 survey to see whether they feel more engaged with their neighbors and more empowered in their dealings with the city. Meanwhile, Salazar is happy to stay on the job.

"I just love this," she says. "The reason I keep coming back is because this work is very rewarding." 

Local people rejected a large parking structure that had been envisioned by BART planners for the transit hub. They said, 'We want to turn this into a village with a town square.'



Charlotte Sunseri, Ninian Stein, Dustin Mulvaney and Altovise Rogers (not pictured) bring new scholarship to campus.

Bringing it to the classroom

New faculty share their scholarship with students

The four new assistant professors joining the College of Social Sciences faculty this semester bring diverse and ambitious research agendas that underscore the breadth of the college's academic mission.

Dustin Mulvaney comes to the Environmental Studies department with an interest in renewable energy technologies and their impacts. Altovise Rogers brings to the Psychology faculty her expertise in industrial/organizational psychology. In the Anthropology department, Charlotte Sunseri researches how long-ago Californians interacted with their environment, while Ninian Stein studies old industrial buildings through archaeological lens.

"With our four bright and talented new professors on board, we look forward to an exciting future for CoSS," Dean Sheila Bienenfeld says. "These scholars are multi-talented, multifaceted and bring multiple disciplinary perspectives to their work. They

bring vitality and enthusiasm to the college, and promise to help us maintain the quality of our programs while developing new strengths as the 21st century unfolds."

Mulvaney, a New Jersey native, started out in chemical engineering and worked for a chemical company before changing directions and earning his Ph.D. in environmental studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

He developed an interest in the politics of regulation and the balance between innovation and risk. "That got me started thinking about the implications of emerging technologies," he says. "How do we think about balancing innovation against risk?"

A particular interest involves new innovations in photovoltaic manufacturing. Newer, more efficient solar panels use toxic compounds involving dangerous heavy metals like cadmium and selenium, Mulvaney says. But what happens when it comes time to recycle devices made from these substances?

"We might have an e-waste crisis with solar materials," Mulvaney says. "These are the kinds of things you might want to think about when you're innovating in this PV space."

Mulvaney hopes students in his class on energy and the environment will develop strong qualitative assessment skills. "The students are great," he says. "They've been starving for this energy stuff."

Rogers became interested in industrial/organizational psychology while an undergraduate at Rice University (in her hometown of Houston). On her way to earning a Ph.D. from the University of Houston, Rogers consulted for a variety of businesses, including oil and gas companies, which have elaborate training programs in highly complex technical procedures for their newly hired engineers.

"It's kind of hard-core training," she explains, explaining that safety is a critical concern in the industry. "There's several years of information that you have to acquire."

A core part of that educational process involves mentoring, Rogers says. In a recently completed paper she looked at whether a senior employee's enthusiasm for mentoring a junior colleague mattered more than the mentor's technical competence. It seems competence wins out.

"If you do not have the skill set, you do worse than someone who is not interested in mentoring but who does it really well," she says. "It demonstrates to the companies that it's really important to provide training to their more experienced employees."

These days, her research interests are veering toward the impact of rapidly evolving mobile communications and social networking on the workplace, where employees increasingly mix personal and business activities. "I'd like to know how that shapes culture and attitudes," she says.

As she takes on a mixed undergraduate/graduate teaching load this semester, Rogers attributes her commitment to academia in part to her family's influence: her father is a corporate trainer and her mother and sister are both teachers.

Sunseri was born in Roswell, N.M., and raised on a farm in the Midwest. While studying for her Ph.D. in anthropology at UC Santa Cruz, she focused on Native Americans in Central California in the centuries before European contact. "I was interested in the subsistence of some of these hunter-gatherer groups that were presumed to be small and mobile," she says.

In fact, there was evidence of sophisticated trade networks in the region. This led to the local extinction of some seal populations, which were over-hunted in order to produce pelts for exchange with others, she found. At the same time, the emergence of these networks "seems to be the critical moment when social inequality develops," as evidenced by disparities in the goods found in burials, Sunseri says.

Much of that work drew on existing archaeological collections that had never been analyzed, tree-ring and ocean floor core data that attested to climate variation and knowledge about seal reproduction rates. "That's what excites me about archaeology,"

Sunseri says. "It asks really interesting anthropological questions, but addresses them through interdisciplinary study."

Her new research interest focuses on the mostly vanished town of Mono Mills in the eastern Sierra Nevadas. Built in the 1870s to provide lumber for nearby gold mines, it was occupied for less than a decade. But the community drew a mix of European-Americans, Chinese immigrant laborers and Paiute workers who were native to the area.

"I'm interested in how they created community from these different backgrounds," says Sunseri, who is planning a field school at the site for her archaeology students. "It's a cool opportunity for hands-on experience in archaeology."

She hopes that uncovering material culture—the stuff of everyday life—will shed light on how people in Mono Mills lived. "It can tell us such a different story and give us such a different picture of day-to-day life," she says.

Stein shares Sunseri's interest in archaeology and has co-lead a dig at a Colonial-era site in Rhode Island, but in recent years she has focused on the untold stories of old New England factories and warehouses.

The daughter of a Brandeis University sociologist, Stein studied anthropology and environmental studies at Brown University, earned master's degrees at Harvard (anthropology) and Yale (environmental science) and completed her Ph.D. in anthropology-archaeology at Brown in 2007.

Stein fell in love with archaeology as a child. As her interests matured, she became interested in "understanding how humans related to their environments over time, how they impacted their environments and how they've been impacted by their environments."

As an undergraduate she did her 200-page honors thesis on the history of the Lebanon Mills in downtown Pawtucket, R.I. The sprawling brick factory built in 1901 went through a series of owners before it was redeveloped into loft housing. Stein documented how effluent from the building flowed into the adjacent Blackstone River for decades before wastewater systems were installed.

The tools of industrial archaeology might include unearthing old blueprints, sewer maps and other archival material and "trying to understand what was not written down," Stein says. "We're looking at the material record."

She compares the work to that done by contract archaeologists who scour the countryside for unexcavated sites in advance of road construction projects. It's a way of helping preservation or redevelopment efforts by letting the past inform possibilities for the future.

Stein is casting an eye around San José for older industrial structures. "I'm on the hunt now for a good site, particularly one where the future is uncertain," she says. "I'm interested in a site close to campus." 📍



Green justice

Alumna holds environmental violators to account

When Criselda Gonzalez got to San José State University in the mid 1970s, she knew she might one day go to law school, but the young student from King City, Calif., had an eye-opening experience when she took a class from political scientist Lela Garner Noble.

“She essentially opened up the world to me,” says Gonzalez. “She just opened up my eyes to the world, political structures, communities outside the Bay Area—it was wonderful.”

Noble, now retired, specialized in Filipino affairs and taught international comparative politics (she later served as dean of the College of Social Sciences and as acting provost of the university).

“I remember that first day in class and saying, ‘Whoa, this woman is so intelligent and she cares so much about her class,’” Gonzalez says. “To this day she remains my mentor and role model.”

Now a senior deputy district attorney in Solano County, midway between San Francisco and Sacramento, Gonzalez has remained in touch with Noble even as she has become highly visible as one of California’s leading environmental prosecutors, routinely holding refineries, trucking companies and water polluters to ac-

count. She often collaborates with state and federal enforcement agencies, as well as counterparts elsewhere in the state.

Gonzalez was born in Robstown, Texas, in a large farm-working family. When she was 6 the family moved to the Salinas Valley of northern California. It was the heyday of California public education, Gonzales recalls. “It was quite a contrast to go from the Mexican barrio in Texas, where limited resources were the norm, to an idyllic community in King City,” she says. A good student, she attracted the attention of a junior high school civics teacher, who urged her to consider law school.

Gonzalez opted to go to San José State because her mother wanted her to stay closer to home. “I had the most wonderful experiences at San José State,” she recalls. “The college atmosphere, the terrific professors who gave so much of their time. I felt I was in a very safe and open environment.”

Lela Noble helped her to set her sights on bigger things. In fact, Noble wrote a letter of recommendation that helped Gonzalez gain admission to the University of San Francisco law school. “I attribute my success, in large part, to her and her teaching, guidance, counseling and unending encouragement,” Gonzalez says. “She saw potential in me that I did not know I had.”

She went to work as a staff attorney for the Legal Aid Society in Oxnard, Calif., and later served in the consumer protection unit of the San Francisco district attorney’s office. That led to her job in Solano County, where she just celebrated her 20th anniversary.

“I’ve always had that public interest bent,” Gonzalez says. “I tell people I do public interest law with a badge.”

She has brought enforcement action against a nearby Exxon refinery and prosecuted trucking companies for spilling hazardous waste on local highways. “I worry about the exposure not only to motorists, but also our responders,” she says. “Often, the cargo is not properly labeled, sealed or secured for transport. Public safety can be compromised if a catastrophic event occurs.”

Gonzalez also led the prosecution of Kinder Morgan Energy Partners after a 14-inch pipeline ruptured in April 2004, spilling more than 100,000 gallons of diesel fuel into a fragile marsh. “We ended up criminally prosecuting the corporation for those violations,” she says. “We got a \$5 million criminal plea bargain. The corporation was on probation for a year. They ended up replacing the line, taking it out of the water and rebuilding it elsewhere.”

Her expertise is widely recognized. She currently chairs the environmental legislation subcommittee of the California District Attorneys Association.

Inspired by Lela Noble’s example of mentorship, Gonzalez makes a point of visiting local community colleges to share her enthusiasm with Hispanic pre-law students. “It bodes well that the years have gone by quickly,” Gonzalez says. “I tell people I still wake up wanting to go to work. I’m lucky I feel that way.”

A friend on the bench

Pioneering jurist mentors disadvantaged youth

In April 1975, Jacqueline My-Le Duong’s father, a lieutenant colonel in the South Vietnamese army, packed his family aboard an overcrowded fishing boat that set out to sea as North Vietnamese troops swept into Saigon.



Duong, who was six at the time, says the care and concern that was shown to her family directly led to the degree in political science she earned from the College of Social Sciences at San José State University and her career as one of the nation’s few Vietnamese-American judges.

“That really makes you feel deeply appreciative of where you are and how blessed you are to have the opportunities of America,” Duong says. “That’s what has motivated me to go into public service, to give back to the country and the community that has given us so much.”

Duong’s family moved to east San José in 1980 because her father couldn’t endure the cold Pennsylvania winters. While her older siblings worked and helped to raise her (she was second youngest), Duong’s job was to work hard in school. “I was the first to graduate from college,” she says.

During freshman career day at San José State, a young Vietnamese American who worked as a prosecutor in the Santa Clara County District Attorney’s Office gave an inspiring talk about

They spent weeks adrift with dwindling fuel and food supplies before a ship picked them up. After a stint in a refugee camp, Duong, her father and her seven siblings were taken in by the Roman Catholic community in Butler, Pa. Thanks to the generosity of their sponsors, the family soon had a home and the children were enrolled in Catholic schools.

the possibility of a legal career. “He said, ‘If someone like me, who’s an immigrant to this country, can do it, then you can do it too,’” she recalls. “That’s what clenched it for me. I was going to go to law school.”

That lawyer, Thang Nguyen Barrett, became a mentor and colleague on the bench, Duong says. They are the only two Vietnamese American judges in courts of general jurisdiction in northern California out of a total of four statewide. Duong decided to major in political science as a preparation for law school. She remembers the poly sci curriculum had a practical, hands-on. “I did telephone banking and precinct-walking,” Duong says.

Duong attended law school at the University of California, Davis, clerked in the Federal Public Defender’s Office in Sacramento, then went to work in the Santa Clara County Public Defender’s Office, where her Vietnamese language skills came in handy.

Then came a job with the Santa Clara County Counsel’s office. “It’s really given me a broad experience in the civil field,” Duong says. Since her appointment to the Santa Clara County Superior Court in 2007, she has handled juvenile justice cases while also serving as presiding judge of the court’s appellate division.

She has worked tirelessly to support Vietnamese American lawyers and businesspeople. She co-founded and was the first president of the Vietnamese American Bar Association of Northern California, founded the Vietnamese American Professional Women of Silicon Valley and organized the first National Conference of Vietnamese American Attorneys, which has evolved into a nascent bar association with 150 members. Duong particularly enjoys working with young offenders, many of whom come from the neighborhood in which she grew up. “Sometimes, after the case is completed, I have gone to visit the California Youth Authority facilities and talked to the kids there directly and asked them, ‘What can I do as a judge to have a greater impact on you?’” she says.

Duong tells them that she, too, came from a disadvantaged background. “I try to share with them that I was an immigrant to this country and English was my second language too,” she says. Once in a while, her words sink in. She tells of a former gang member who came to her offices, neatly dressed. “I said, ‘How did this happen? Tell me,’” she says. “He said, ‘It’s because I listened to your story.’”

Duong still looks to her father, now in his 80s, as a role model. “He really was the motivating factor for me to work really hard, after I saw the sacrifices he made for us,” she says. Duong seems intent on never forgetting where she came from and how her experiences molded her.

“I’m very proud to say I graduated from San José State,” she says. “I feel very home-grown, local. I know this area. I know the system and the issues that are important to this area.”



Down at the hub

Creating one-stop shopping for student study support

Starting sometime next spring, College of Social Sciences students who have questions about their academic majors or who are in need of a little peer mentoring will be able to drop by a suite in Clark Hall to have all their needs met in one place.

At least, that's the dream of Jan English-Lueck, the college's new associate dean. English-Lueck has been tasked with getting the proposed Student Success Center off the ground.

In this "grand experiment," she envisions a space where students will be able to hang out, conduct club meetings, check in with advisors or mentors and find the shortest path to the right university office to have their needs met.

"We have to help them get through, get out and get on," English-Lueck says.

San José State University has long had centers for writing, tutoring and career counseling, but they haven't been easy for students to access, she says, citing a proverb from China, where she did much of her research as an anthropologist: "The mountains are high and the emperor is far away."

One-stop shopping is the name of the game, she says. "Our model for a student success center is a hub. Nationwide, more campuses have been moving to this model over the past decade."

The need is undeniable. The College of Social Sciences has 3,500 undergraduate majors, English-Lueck says. Accounting for those meeting general education requirements, about 4,600 students enroll in its classes overall.

Meanwhile, the university loses about 20 percent of its first-time freshmen and 16 percent of its transfer students by the end of their first year. "This retention rate is one of the major metrics we aim to improve," she says.

Because many of the students enrolling in Social Sciences classes are fulfilling their course requirements for majors in other colleges, they may not be familiar with

the writing and quantitative analysis tools that are commonly required in the social sciences, English-Lueck says.

"They need to understand things about people and places that are fundamentally different," she says. When these students encounter problems, the success center will help pair them with the resources they need.

For at-risk students generally—those in or heading toward academic probation—"the idea is to catch people's problems early and help them as soon as possible," English-Lueck says.

But before things reach that point, the center could offer pre-major advising to students who are undecided about which direction to take. "Not that many of our majors have a clear idea of what it is to be an anthropologist or an environmental scientist," she says. "It becomes a place to build identity and community."

The student success center could also work with the university's career center to help people figure out "the next step after college," English-Lueck says, adding, "We have a large proportion of first generation-to-university students" who could use some guidance in identifying various career paths.

She is also considering asking Social Sciences graduate students to develop a project to assess how well the success center serves students' needs.

So far, English-Lueck has been working solo on this project, visiting with success centers in other colleges around campus. "There are many, many stakeholders in this," she says. Some marketing will be necessary to make students aware of the new resource—and that will require some pizza. "If you want them you've got to feed them," she quips.

Meanwhile, "the mantra has to be coherence, coherence, coherence," she emphasizes. "We can create a hub that from the students' perspective is, if not seamless, at least not perplexing." ☉



Getting organized

A graduate student's commitment to community

Some urban planners might be content to sit at their desks and dream of the ideal city, giving loving attention to the built infrastructure—roads, buildings and bridges—but Johnasies McGraw would rather be out in the community, talking to people.

He says it's just common sense.

"My capacity to influence what will happen on the ground will come from being more familiar with what people are thinking," reasons McGraw, a graduate student in urban planning in the College of Social Sciences who comes with an extensive background in community organizing. "I definitely approach planning in that way, where I want to build as much consensus as possible."

McGraw, 31, grew up across the Mississippi River from New Orleans in an area crowded with oil refineries and shipping facilities. Although he didn't realize it at the time, there were significant

disparities in the way the area's industrial infrastructure affected surrounding communities.

After a few unhappy years at Notre Dame University, he took a leave to work as a community organizer for the non-profit Citizens Action Coalition of Indiana. He remembers visiting communities like Gary, the steel-producing city on the shores of Lake Michigan whose predominantly African American residents suffer from the state's highest asthma rates.

"Being there and talking to people, it was a really interesting thing," he says. "When people just threw their hands up and said there wasn't anything they could do, it kind of infuriated me a little bit. I felt if there was any kind of impact I could make, I wanted to make those impacts in a more direct way."

McGraw was starting to realize the importance of helping people who didn't feel empowered to become more involved in local politics and policy making. He moved back to New Orleans to work for the U.S. Public Interest Research Group before relocating to California, where he finished his undergraduate degree at San Francisco State University, majoring in political science with an urban studies minor.

After a stint as an AmeriCorps volunteer in San Francisco, he was hired by the Local Initiative Support Corporation to work in a comprehensive sustainable community program in Oakland's Eastlake neighborhood. That job entailed organizing a business improvement district, among other things. In 2010 he started work toward his master's degree in urban planning at San José State University.

McGraw says he has enjoyed learning about the science that goes into land use planning. "I found the program to be very good," he says. "It's actually more technical in nature, as opposed to rigorously academic or theoretical."

Meanwhile, he has been working with the Richmond Main Street Initiative, writing grants and helping to develop a mapping program to identify properties that might be redeveloped in the downtown business district.

"I'm very much fascinated by and recognize the necessity of public-private partnerships," McGraw says. Having worked for a variety of Bay Area development agencies, McGraw sees the need for taking a region-wide approach in urban planning, but one that allows for as much consensus building with local communities as possible.

At the moment, he's trying to decide whether to continue on toward a Ph.D. in urban planning or return to hands-on urban and economic development. He self-identifies as a generalist, believing that to be a valuable skill in urban planning and community development.

"The bigger-picture mentality is pretty transferable to anything I do," he says. "That's what I value the most from my work." ☉



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