

CLASSROOM IN THE (URBAN) DIRT

By Robyn Waxman

Sacramento City College's pilot phase of "City Farm" [see March 2011 edition of Union News. Ed.] is in full swing this semester, bringing two disciplines and enormous energy to a classroom in the dirt campus garden. This curriculum-based and cross-disciplinary garden represents the collective planning of faculty, staff, administrators, and students.

Why a Garden?

City Farm can make abstract theory more tangible for our next generation of learners. In these times of economic instability, we are forced to be creative. While we can't buy equipment or afford guest speakers like we might have in the past, we can use the resources we have on campus—the actual campus. We are currently experiencing, and are about to welcome students from feeder schools who work and learn in campus gardens. City Farm can provide a bridge from these programs, nurturing better transitions into college level learning and college culture. There is a growing list of faculty interested in adopting a City Farm plot for academic use in disciplines like History, Geography, Art in Chemistry, Engineering, and Graphic Communication.

Experimental and Experiential

Young adults of 2011 ask *why*. They have a need to understand purpose, context, and goals of the material they learn. As I heard one 20-something describe to me last year, "tell me why I'm setting up this boring Excel spread sheet, and I'll do it all day!" Students want to understand knowledge's application and to see theory made real. The phenomenon can be challenging for educators, but we can also employ it to produce a generation of scholars who question the status quo, who remember their classroom experiences through a kinesthetic engagement, and who actively practice and apply critical thinking. Think statistics and probability, role-playing alternative economic models, and 3D data visualizations. How about role playing the agri-business industry, facilitating community events, or building a dye garden? The applications are endless, fascinating and exciting.

Early Adopters

Plant Biology and Early Childhood Education classes will spearhead the pilot project, using the soil as part of their classroom experience. Each semester the Biology Department purchases species to study under the microscope. Growing the species at City Farm will offer students a more memorable, experiential approach to the curriculum. The City Farm Club, which includes students from varying disciplines, will help facilitate these curricular projects.



Robyn Waxman is coordinating the City Farm Club and the garden's programming. She is also a founding faculty member of the Graphic Communication department at Sacramento City College.

Additionally, the student group shares a plot at City Farm and plans to offer educational programming to the SCC community. Ryan Thalken, City Farm Club President describes the project as "... a rare opportunity for students of all disciplines to form community."

With an innovative frame, any discipline can effectively use a garden to augment the traditional classroom. This creates deeper and more memorable learning for all disciplines.

The City Farm pilot project currently resides between Lillard Hall and the Sutterville Road staff parking lot. ■



City Farm's just built raised beds, full of potential!

[more photos on next page]

City Farm



Passing the "torch" to Ryan Thalken, City Farm Club President



Dr. Kathryn Jeffery, SCC President and Ryan Thalken, City Farm Club President: engaging with the CDC children in turning the dirt

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