

Students In Action Summary Report: Phase I

Introduction

Students In Action (SIA) is a California State University (CSU) program funded by a grant from the Corporation for National Community service to support “student leadership opportunities as a means to increase the level of student involvement in critical civic issues.”¹ SIA funds are specifically used to form student leadership teams on selected campuses within the CSU to identify and address civic issues of importance to students and community. The goals of the program are four-fold: (1) to increase understanding of civic issues and participation; (2) to enhance knowledge and skills of students in identifying important civic issues and to develop action goals to address them; (3) to make civic engagement central to student learning and the campus academic culture; and (4) to build strong voices and role models among students engaged in civic actions.

Purpose of this Report

The CSU Community Service Learning office is conducting a research study to describe SIA projects operating on four CSU campuses and assess their impact on student learning and development. Participating campuses in 2004-2005 are: Humboldt, Monterey Bay, San Luis Obispo, and San Jose. This report presents an overview of each campus SIA project. Between April 30, 2004 and November 12, 2004 interviews were conducted with campus student leadership teams. Students were asked to provide information about their prior involvement in community service work and SIA project goals and plans. Each interview lasting approximately 90 minutes was conducted through the Chancellor’s Office televideo conference facility.

Results

This section summarizes the salient attributes of SIA campus leadership teams and project goals and plans. (For more detailed information on each project, see Appendices A-1 to A-4.)

SIA Team Profile

One attribute shared in common by all SIA projects is the wealth of prior community service and student leadership experience within the campus teams. Ranging from three to seven members, teams are composed mainly of upper division and graduate students who have worked or have held leadership positions in a wide variety of community and student service organizations both on and off-campus. Two teams in particular, Humboldt and San Jose, have students with background experiences that are directly related to the focus of their campus projects, hunger and youth development, respectively.

¹ From Students In Action Request for Proposals. Community Service Learning Office. October 2003.

Interviews revealed that students choose to become involved in SIA projects for different reasons. Some students primarily view the experience as part of their service learning course or as a way to fulfill graduate level research requirements. Other students emphasize their interest in the specific issue being addressed or the experience of simply being involved in community service work as the primary reason for participation.

Interviews with Humboldt and San Jose project teams provided the first opportunity for students to meet together and discuss their projects. Most members of the San Jose team were not yet familiar with the SIA project proposal. In contrast, the two remaining teams at San Luis Obispo and Monterey bay had been meeting and planning activities for at least a couple of months. The Monterey team, which was interviewed in late May 2004, was formed in September 2003 and planned to work during summer and fall 2004. In short, SIA projects were created at different times and were at different points in their development at the time of the initial interviews. Consequently, the quantity and quality of information that students were able to provide with respect to the primary purpose of campus projects, goals and activities were uneven.

Civic Issues

SIA projects at San Luis Obispo and Humboldt are closely related. The San Luis Obispo team plans to focus its efforts on problems of hunger and Humboldt has chosen to work on issues related to both hunger and homelessness. Monterey Bay and San Jose have selected Gay-Lesbianism and youth development issues to address in their respective communities, respectively.

Each team has initially defined the geographic area and the target groups within these areas that will receive SIA project services. For example, local community shelters and schools will likely be the primary places for project services related to hunger, homeless and youth community issues. The primary target group for the Gay-Lesbian project will be students on campus and the general population of Monterey County.

During the interview process, SIA project teams clearly exhibited strong idealism, commitment, and enthusiasm for serving the needs of their respective communities of interest. The interview also solicited the thoughts and opinions of each team about the factors that contribute most to the problems they have chosen to address. The most prevalent factors cited were prejudice and intolerance, lack of community awareness, insufficient community resources, poor education, inability of people to take personal responsibility for their behavior, and government bureaucracy. A glimpse of how SIA projects might respond to these issues in due course was revealed in part in their discussion of project goals and activities.

Project Goals and Activities

Students at Humboldt indicated that they had not yet developed specific goals for their project. However, during the interview a number of activities listed in Appendix A

were suggested. Students at Monterey and San Luis Obispo emphasized the building of community and campus awareness and getting more students involved in dealing with Gay-Lesbian and hunger/homelessness issues as important project goals. The San Jose project team mentioned increasing self-worth and improving college entry opportunities among at risk high school youth as desired project outcomes.

Interviews provided information about some of the activities SIA projects were planning or contemplating to accomplish their goals. Among those mentioned included direct services such as job skill training, disseminating information about social services for the homeless and educational resources for troubled youth, and tutoring underachieving high school students.

Summary and Conclusions

Interviews were conducted with SIA student leadership teams on four CSU campuses to describe the student make-up of the teams and the projects to be implemented over the next several months. Interviews revealed highly committed students across all projects who want to raise awareness of homelessness, hunger, Gay-Lesbian, and youth development issues within their communities and to offer services to address these issues and thereby bring about positive change. At the time interviews were conducted three of the four campus SIA projects were just getting started and had not yet fully developed their goals and action plans. The CSU Community Service Learning Office will monitor the progress of these projects and provide support to ensure their success during 2004-2005.

This report completes the initial phase of the CSU research study. The next phase of the study will describe the implementation of SIA projects and assess their impact on students' learning and development.