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Jumpstart Program Connects Students with Preschoolers

Cal State Fullerton students are helping to boost literacy in preschools through the Jumpstart Fullerton Program.

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by Laurie McLaughlin

University and preschool students are learning from each other in the Jumpstart Fullerton Program.

The program puts Cal State Fullerton students into several different Head Start classrooms in north Orange County. The focus for preschoolers is boosting literacy, and the benefits for the volunteer university students encompass a range of experiences, from classroom management to one-on-one teaching skills.

Jumpstart is a collaboration between the [Child and Adolescent Studies Department](#), Western Regional Jumpstart and Orange County's Head Start programs, as well as AmeriCorps, which compensates the approximately 50 university students participating in the program annually.

AmeriCorps has awarded grants amounting to more than \$195,000 to the campus in support of the program.

Each CSUF student is assigned to one "partner" child — a 4-year-old at risk for kindergarten success — in a Head Start classroom for a year. Participation includes enrollment in one of two attendant university courses taught in the fall by Shu-Chen J. Yen, assistant professor of child and adolescent studies, and 300 hours of community service and Head Start classroom time.

Each volunteer receives a \$1,000 AmeriCorps stipend at the end of the program.

Jeannie Kim-Han, director of the Center for Internships and Service-Learning, brought the national program to the university in 2003, and Child and Adolescent Studies, chaired by Patricia A. Szeszulski, serves as program host. Shanda Barnett is Jumpstart coordinator.

"While our primary focus is on emergent literacy skills, we support the children's development in all areas," says Susan G. Shipstead, lecturer in child and adolescent studies who teaches the two attendant courses in spring. "During each visit, our students read to their target children, using strategies to enhance language development and pre-reading skills."

The volunteers also are involved in the routine activities within the classroom as they partner with the preschool teachers.

"They learn about well-researched, early childhood curriculum and how to use a wide range of developmentally appropriate 'key experiences' to observe children, support growth and plan activities," says Shipstead.

"We also prepare and teach lesson plans two times a week and focus on exercises that would enhance their language and literacy," added Jumpstart volunteer Tarrah Macavinta, who received her degree in child and adolescent development in June and is now pursuing a second degree in nursing.

"The program provided a lot of work besides service — like paperwork and organizing lesson plans — and on top of that, I was taking 19 units, so I also learned how to be more organized and manage my time."

Jumpstart will recruit volunteers for the 2006-07 school year in spring, says Kim-Han, who noted that the program is designed to quantify results. "There's a very specific curriculum that's implemented and a heavy evaluation component because we want to monitor and evaluate the progress of these children as a result of this intervention."

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The program has received funding from other benefactors in addition to AmeriCorps, including: a donation of nearly \$12,000-worth of classroom supplies from alumna and early childhood advocate Susan Villascas; \$3,000 from Target; \$3,000 from Best Buy for Martin Luther King Jr. Day activities; support from Starbucks Coffee by hosting family literacy nights; Jumpstart-emblazoned T-shirts and sweatshirts provided by American Eagle Outfitters; and Jumpstart curriculum manuals from Pearson Publishing.

"I interact with children much differently now than when I first started the program. I'm much more aware of what types of questions to ask and what activities are developmentally appropriate to stimulate progress," says Andrea Caplis, a child and adolescent development major. "The thought of being responsible for teaching a classroom and leading three other team members seemed overwhelming. Now looking back at the experience, I think it was just a matter of rising to the occasion."

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