

CCE CORNER

The Center for Community Engagement's newsletter designed to share community engagement highlights each semester with our larger TCNJ community and network

Know Your Issue



NEWS & FEATURES

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Know Your Issue Project

BY LANDIS HACKETT

The Know Your Issue (KYI) project connects the public policy research interests and capabilities of college students with the information needs of community-based organizations working to address pressing social, economic, and environmental issues. This research opportunity provides students with training and support to explore the scope of the problem, current policies, and effective solutions to issues they are passionate about. Most research topics are also selected based on the work or research needs of a particular community-based organization, giving each research project a local and real world application outside of the classroom.

During the 2020-21 school year, 24 students from 13 different majors attended regular KYI training sessions. This group produced 16 total issue briefs on topics related to Adult Education, Environment & Food Security, and K-12 Education. For most students, their selected research topics touched on their personal, academic, and career interests.

This academic year, a group of Bonner and CCE students and staff are collaborating with faculty in the School for Humanities and Social Sciences to offer credit-bearing Know Your Issue research opportunities to any interested TCNJ student. Looking long-term, the KYI project hopes to make public policy-focused community-based research opportunities available to TCNJ students across all departments through academic courses and independent studies.

If you are interested in collaborating with or getting involved in the Know Your Issue Project, please contact Landis Hackett: hackettl@tcnj.edu.

Community Engagement & Professional Development Provide An Impactful Summer of Service

BY AMY SCHRATZ

Preparing meal & food donations for Trenton residents. Making literacy and science fun for local youth on Zoom. Connecting with community members within the community garden. These are just a few examples of TCNJ's Summer Community Leaders' experiences this summer. On August 20th, TCNJ's Center for Community Engagement, in collaboration with the Center for Career and Leadership Development and the NJ Bonner AmeriCorps program, wrapped up our fifth Summer Community Leaders (SCL) cohort!

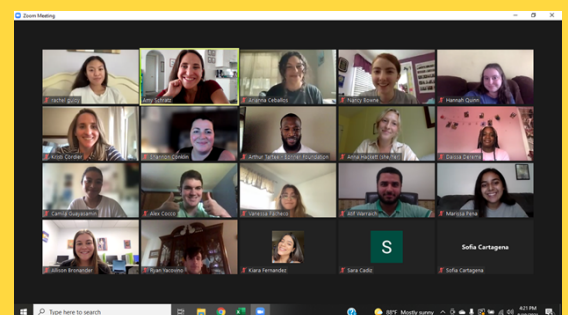
SCL is a ten-week summer of service experience that integrates community engagement and professional development to create a collaborative learning community. This summer we placed 17 students with 10 community organizations in Mercer County, with the vast majority of sites located in Trenton. Over the course of the summer, SCL members served a total of 4,250 hours and participated in over 850 total hours of professional development. Virtual professional development sessions focused on a broad range of topics from the social determinants of health to data collection to networking and public speaking. SCL members also participated in bi-weekly discussions exploring one of two books: *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Matthew Desmond or *This Book is Anti-Racist* by Tiffany Jewell.

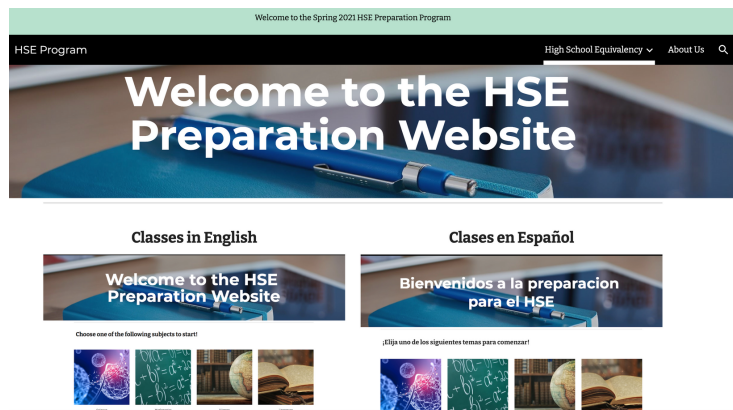
Marissa Peña, a member with Capital Area YMCA, shared in her closing evaluation that "This experience made me feel inspired to continue serving the communities I am a part of. I feel more understanding of the needs of the Trenton community (especially with the issue of food insecurity) making me better able to serve it." The majority of SCL members reported that they are more likely to continue participating in community engagement because of their summer of service.

To learn more about Summer Community Leaders please visit <https://cce.tcnj.edu/cel-institute/scl/> or email scl@tcnj.edu.

"This experience made me feel inspired to continue serving the communities I am a part of."

-Marissa Peña,
Member with
Capital Area YMCA





Bonniers Work with El Centro Program to Create Website for High School Equivalency

BY SAM KANIG

Covid-19 had severe impacts on how nonprofits serve the community. El Centro by Catholic Charities definitely faced those challenges with admirable resilience. El Centro remains a consistent and trusted resource in the local Spanish-speaking community for those seeking help with basic needs, job training, ESL, parenting classes and immigration services. In an effort to continue providing one of their most requested services, preparation for the high school equivalency examination, TCNJ Bonner Scholars along with TCNJ Bonner AmeriCorps members dedicated over 380 hours to El Centro during the spring semester. Collectively they worked together with El Centro in structuring virtual classrooms, building curriculum and actively engaging in community outreach. The high school equivalency preparation class now has the participation of dozens of individuals from the community.

A great outcome of this hard work has been a resource and educational website being used to teach the high school equivalency classes virtually. The website creation and development is being led by TCNJ AmeriCorps member, Frank Scallo, who is also TCNJ Bonner alumni Class of 2020. The website began as part of Frank's senior Bonner capstone and has since had contributions of some very talented and passionate Bonners to assist in its completion. Currently the website is in its final stages of development and is already being used in the virtual classrooms at El Centro.

Acknowledging that human interaction is irreplaceable, TCNJ Bonners plan to resume in-person classes as soon as the social distancing directives allow. In the meantime, Bonners will finalize the website and work closely with El Centro staff to plan for the inclusion of hybrid/virtual classroom environments in the year to come, thereby capitalizing on the opportunity to connect with individuals who normally would not be able to attend in-person classes.

Thank you for taking the time to celebrate these stories with us. We welcome new TCNJ and community partnerships, ideas for community engagement, and donors to support our ongoing work. We would be happy to share more information with anyone interested.

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