Stockton University Selected for AASCU’s ‘Re-Imagining the First Year of College’

Stockton University was selected by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) to participate in the three-year “Re-Imagining the First Year of College” (RFY) project, a sweeping initiative aimed at transforming the first year of college to enhance students’ success in their undergraduate years and in the 21st century workplace. AASCU kicked off the RFY initiative with academic leaders at the association’s 2016 Academic Affairs Winter Meeting.

Susan Davenport, interim provost and executive vice president; Peter Baratta, chief planning officer; Michelle McDonald, interim assistant provost; Sonia Gonsalves, professor of Psychology and director of Academic Assessment; and Lolita Treadwell, executive assistant to the provost, represented Stockton University at the Winter Meeting held in Austin, Texas from Feb. 4-6.

Davenport, Baratta and Treadwell led a joint presentation titled, “Empowering Students and Faculty to Create Opportunities for Success,” which addressed funding initiatives that encourage faculty and students to work together in undergraduate research, travel and pilot projects. Examples included Stockton’s 2020 Initiative, the Research Experiences for Undergraduates, Student Travel Fund, and Activist-in-Residence programs.

The first year of college has emerged as the critical period for predicting future student success, as what happens during these early terms often determines whether a student will persist into their second year, as well as to graduation.

The objective of the RFY project is to help participants and the broader AASCU membership of 420 institutions to implement changes that enhance the first-year student experience and increase student retention and graduation rates, particularly among historically under-served populations.

“Not all changes need to be big. Rethinking the messages we [as faculty] provide on assignments, while advising, or to those students on academic probation, might have big payoffs in how students think about their performance and their capacity to do better,” McDonald said.

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“Students’ fear of not fitting in has a major impact on their academic performance, and not just those we traditionally think of as ‘at risk.’ Even the best-prepared students find themselves wondering if they made the right choice and if they have what it takes,” Davenport said. “Emphasizing that such doubts are not only widespread, but also entirely natural, should be a critical part of every first-year orientation.”

As one of 44 institutions nationwide chosen for AASCU’s RFY project, Stockton will select and implement proven, innovative strategies and programs, adapting them to the campus’s unique environment and needs. The evidence-based strategies focus on four core areas to help first-year students succeed: institutional intentionality - mission-based initiatives; curriculum; faculty and staff roles; and student roles.

The Stocktonians attended sessions on effective use of institutional data, developing faculty incentives and awards, and the value of “signature work” for student success.

“Our first steps at Stockton must include working with our first-year specialists to review the information that we have on-hand about the first-year experience in classes, with advising and in the social realm, and using these data to guide what we do next,” Gonsalves said. “The AASCU project charges us to consider both the intellectual and the belonging needs of first-year students as we plan to further support their success.”

“Students often think intelligence is fixed – you either come to college smart enough, or you falter. Instead, we’d like to use the first year to emphasize a ‘growth mindset,’ the idea that intelligence is malleable and that trying makes you stronger. It’s not about being smart, in other words, it’s about getting smarter,” McDonald said.

Athletics Celebrates National Girls and Women in Sports Day

Stockton Athletics celebrated National Girls and Women in Sports Day with a program which exposed about 40 young girls, grade 8 and below, to a variety of sports and activities on Feb. 6.

“We hosted local groups and teams for a day of fun and sports,” said Athletic Trainer Chris Klenk, who served on the organizational committee. “The girls were then treated to lunch before attending the Stockton women’s basketball game against Ramapo. The girls were enthusiastic and really seemed to enjoy themselves while participating in the various activities.”

The organizational committee was led by Allison Walker, head volleyball coach, and Nick Juengert, head coach of women’s soccer. Other members of the committee included: Klenk; Joe Fussner, head coach of women’s basketball; Mav Hering, head softball coach; Cristina Maurizi, head coach of women’s lacrosse; Sarah Elleman, head field hockey coach; and Linda Yost, associate director of Intercollegiate Sports.

Student athletes also volunteered, representing each of Stockton women’s sports teams: soccer, basketball, track & field, tennis, volleyball, softball, field hockey and lacrosse.

“This was a great opportunity to get the local community involved with the Stockton Athletics program,” said Hering. “The women’s basketball team is having a great season, and the girls were exposed to a college game. Several Stockton employees brought their daughters, too, and it was fun for them to see where their parents work.”
Faculty Compile Report on the Status of Women in Atlantic County

Betsy Erbaugh, assistant professor of Sociology; Kristin Jacobson, associate professor of Literature; and Ellen Mutari, professor of Economics, led a team of researchers to compile the first-ever report on the Status of Women in Atlantic County.

The project began in 2014, when the Atlantic County Advisory Commission on Women (ACACW) requested the assistance of Stockton University faculty and students in developing a report on the status of women and girls in Atlantic County.

Women and girls make up over half of Atlantic County’s population and are a diverse group, as demonstrated by the demographic data presented, explained Jacobson. The goal of the Commission and the researchers was to provide accurate information on living conditions, available resources, strengths and challenges facing women and girls in order to inform policy-making efforts in Atlantic County and the region.

The Stockton researchers followed guidelines provided by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research in Washington, D.C. to outline their data. The pilot report shows current data on women and girls in Atlantic County and relevant comparison data for the state of New Jersey and the United States in six sections: basic demographics; political participation; employment and earnings; social and economic autonomy; reproductive health and rights; and general health and well-being.

Economic data indicate that Atlantic County women earn less than both their state and national counterparts as well as men at all levels, Mutari explained. The median earnings for full-time, year-round female workers are $36,727 in Atlantic County compared with $50,960 for Atlantic County men: a wage gap of over $14,000 per year.

Prenatal health care data indicate that Atlantic County women may not be fully utilizing area health resources, suggesting that poverty, access to information, transportation or other factors may present barriers to women seeking care, Erbaugh said.

The group presented its findings to the Atlantic County Commissioners, the County Executive and Freeholders at meetings throughout 2015.

“It’s our intention that the data will inform policy making, especially as the county undergoes significant economic change,” Erbaugh said. “Stockton’s support for community engagement has been key to the report’s success. Dr. Jacobson, Dr. Mutari and our students fully committed themselves to the project, and the positive response from the commission and the county has validated our efforts.”

Under the supervision of Erbaugh, Jacobson and Mutari, 34 students in three undergraduate courses contributed research for the report over the course of the 2014-2015 academic year.

Stockton staff members who were integral to the success of the report include: Daniel Fidalgo Tomé, director of Service-Learning; Diana Strelczyk and Erin O’Hanlon, program assistants in Service-Learning; and Merydawilda Colón, executive director of the Stockton Center for Community Engagement.

Stockton students Mariam Majd, Jessica Brown, Alina Harper and Erich Guetzlaff edited and designed the final product.

Faculty and student work on the report has been supported by the Scholarship of Engagement Pilot Funding Program. The School of Social & Behavioral Sciences supported the print production of the report.

To read the Report on the Status of Women in Atlantic County 2015, click here. Conclusions for each of the six areas of research can be found on page 91 of the report.
Lauren Del Rossi Featured in Pediatric Physical Therapy Journal


“I took advantage of some the digital opportunities to increase the impact of my article. I was interviewed by the journal podcast and I created a digital abstract,” Del Rossi said. Her podcast interview is available under Volume 27, Issue 4, Winter 2015 and starts at 7 minutes, 30 seconds.

ABS is primarily an exceptionally rare genetic disorder of cartilaginous and skeletal abnormalities, explained Del Rossi.

In the case report, Del Rossi described her treatment of a female patient with ABS, over the first three years of life.

“When I first encountered this patient, I struggled to find guidance within the literature for clinical reasoning within physical therapy and this work is significant because to my knowledge, it’s the first of its kind to focus on rehabilitation of a patient with ABS,” Del Rossi explained during her digital abstract.

Del Rossi acknowledged the support of Stockton’s Physical Therapy team.

“A huge thank you to everyone that helped me along the way,” Del Rossi said. “My colleagues spent a lot of time reading some really rough drafts, patiently listening, editing and keeping me focused. I could not have done it without them.”

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