

POSITIVE PERSPECTIVES

STUDENT-RUN PR FIRM TAKES OFF

BY JO ANN LLOYD

IT JUST MIGHT BE TRUE that the best things in life are free.

Ask the folks at the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County or the nonprofit North County Connection agency. Those are just a two of many local nonprofit organizations that are benefiting from a small group of Cal Poly journalism students working for free for Central Coast PRspectives, a totally student-run public relations agency.

Now in its sixth year, CCPR is advised by Journalism Professor Doug Swanson, who came on board two years ago. Before Swanson, there was no real consistency for students in the public relations track in the Journalism Department. "If you want to run a PR firm, you need to have the same person overseeing it year after year; there can't be a revolving door of advisors," Swanson said.

With a background in "the real world of broadcasting," Swanson brings to the department a wealth of knowledge and experience. "I'm a jack-of-all-trades media person," he said. "I've worked in radio and TV, at a newspaper and in public relations, so I can go to the students with that additional perspective."

How fitting that CCPR was created in 2002 by a senior journalism student who insisted that Cal Poly as a learn-by-doing institution needed to give public relations students additional help beyond the classroom setting.

CCPR is a required class for journalism students on the public relations



track. About 10 to 12 students, all in their final year of school, spend one quarter working for the agency, learning what they couldn't possibly learn in a classroom. Students would never experience the challenge that clients bring to the equation.

"CCPR has allowed them to have the interpersonal experience with clients they couldn't get any other way," Swanson said. "Some clients want things that simply aren't realistic, aren't possible ... they don't understand public relations. So we work with them to understand PR and how they can use it to help their organization grow."

The students are providing a valuable service to the community. "These nonprofits don't get this help anywhere for free," Swanson said. The students help these agencies in a variety of public relations functions, including locating funding, creating visibility and enhancing accessibility.

Wende David, membership and development manager for The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, has worked with students for several years on the organization's annual holiday appeal program.

"It's a really fun partnership because we get to help develop student skills, and they in turn offer a fresh perspective," David said. "Plus we're a local nonprofit, so it's really great to have these collaborative relationships. It enriches San Luis Obispo's core community by keeping it local and it teaches students the value of strengthening their community."

Megan Korbel (JOUR) student manager of CCPR, volunteers at least 12 hours a week overseeing the agency, meeting with clients to find a good fit with students, making sure students stay on task, running a weekly staff meeting, just generally tying up any loose ends.

"I thought the position would help me develop good managerial, leadership and public speaking skills," Korbel said. Plus it looks good on a resume.

She plans to graduate in spring 2009 and attend law school. In the meantime, she'll continue to manage CCPR. "I've already completed all my public relations classes, so managing CCPR keeps me involved." □

