With the spring semester halfway over, students, staff and faculty are excitedly participating in events and organizations that encourage civic engagement. A goal of the American Democracy Project is to increase the number of students who are civically engaged. This month’s newsletter highlights several of the activities that we have been supporting as vehicles for student involvement. Please check out these organizations. If you are a student, think about getting involved. If you are a member of our faculty or staff, then please encourage students you work with to check out these activities. If you would like a group or activity to be highlighted, then let us know.

Democracy Matters meets every Wednesday at 7 p.m. in Corey Union room 204. Democracy Matters is a national non-partisan, non-profit organization that mobilizes students around the issue of money in politics. Students in Democracy Matters are concerned with the amount of money that big corporations and wealthy donors give to political campaigns and politicians. We feel that in order for a true democracy to exist, there must be a system established in which voices of the voters are listened to and not the dollars from special interest lobbyists. Through a public financing system, politicians would be more accountable to the people they represent and not to the corporations and lobbyists. Public financing systems, also known as Fair and Clean Elections and Voter-Owned Elections, increase voter participation and rid voters of feelings of disenfranchisement and corruption. This success of public financing has been proven time and time again in states like Maine and Arizona and in cities like Portland, Oregon.

At SUNY Cortland, Democracy Matters has been a student organization since the spring of 2004. Started by a handful of concerned service-learning students, Democracy Matters is now a strong organization recognized by Student Government Association. We have hosted many events that raise questions regarding civil rights and money in politics, health care reform, voter rights, student suffrage, and the role of women in political reform. We have also participated in large voter registration drives, the largest being the 2004 election that resulted in 1,400 students registered in just two months. Democracy Matters is on of the lead organizers for annual Earth Day celebrations at SUNY Cortland. This semester, we look forward to going into local high school classrooms and talking with students about the importance of youth involvement in politics and social reform. We also are working in coalition with the Tompkins County Health Care Task Force on educating the public on the benefits of universal health care and why it is such a struggle in this nation and specifically in New York.

One of the great things about Democracy Matters is that we are entirely student based. This serves as an empowering characteristic for many young people. Because we recognize the importance of young activists to improve democratic systems, we offer on-campus paid internships for college students. Students are paid a $750 stipend each semester and may be eligible to receive credit.
Democracy Matters is currently looking for motivated and capable students to serve as the Campus Coordinator for Democracy Matters starting fall 2006. Democracy Matters assists new activists with skill development including leadership, public speaking, and grassroots organizing. Anyone interested can contact Lauren Caruso at caruso24@cortland.edu.

The SUNY Cortland chapter meets every week on Thursday at 6 p.m. in the Brooks Museum, Cornish Hall. Amnesty International is a group dedicated to ending Human Rights abuses around the world. They fight for the freeing of prisoners of conscience, trials for political prisoners, abolishing the death penalty worldwide, denouncing torture, and ending political killings and forced disappearances, among other Human Rights issues.

The Cortland chapter of Amnesty has been quite active, campaigning for prisoners of conscience in Eastern Europe and Asia, and holding an informational teach-in on Human Rights abuses in Africa. The Africa teach-in covered the topics of the genocide in Darfur, violence against women and female genital mutilation, conflict diamonds from Sierra Leone, the illegal arms trade, and child soldiers. There was a large turnout for the teach-in, and many members of the audience took action by signing the many petitions to United States cabinet members to denounce these actions and take an active part in ending them.

Amnesty is also planning to hold another teach-in this semester, this time covering a very pertinent and current issue, Torture and the War on Terror. This will be a part of Amnesty USA's nation-wide teach-in on torture, and it will cover such topics as the treatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, CIA "Black Sites," and American forces outsourcing prisoners to be tortured in other countries, among other topics. Amnesty will also be participating in Earth Day, focusing on corporate accountability for businesses that pollute heavily and sometimes permanently damage the environment. The members of Amnesty are looking forward to a very active semester this spring. We urge faculty and staff in the strongest possible terms to encourage students to join this organization. It provides students with an experience that is hard to duplicate inside the classroom.

POWER of WOMEN CONFERENCE

POWER meets each week on Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Corey Union, room 407-B. POWER (Planet of Women for Equality and Respect) is hosting a student organized women's conference on April 8th. This conference will be focusing on an array of topics that concern women and girls across the globe. Students, faculty, and neighboring scholars will run workshops touching on subjects such as women in social movements, sex trafficking, the perception of women in children's literature, women in political activism, men and feminism, and many others. Judy Gorman, a singer/songwriter/activist, will deliver a keynote address entitled “A Multicultural History of Women in Music: Finding Our Own Voice.” A musical performance by Gorman, Colleen Kattau, and Karina Murphy will close the conference at 4:15 in Old Main. This is an entirely free event for everyone. Because POWER and other sponsors are providing a free lunch, those who wish to participate are strongly encouraged to register for the conference ahead of time. Registration forms are available in the Student Government office in 217 Corey Union and the Sociology/Anthropology Office in D-311 Cornish Hall. Any questions or comments can be sent to cortlandpower@yahoo.com. Please show your support for our students and activists by attending this event!
SERVICE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND OFFERINGS

The number of community agencies that partner with SUNY Cortland service-learning (SL) courses continues to grow. A CPN 103 (Academic Writing in the Curriculum II) student is volunteering with one new partner, CAPE (Citizens for Aquifer Protection and Employment). In April, Health Educators will meet with a representative of a potential new partner, Prevention Services for Youth (PSY), to discuss new service-learning initiatives. PSY would be the 50th organization on our list of current or potential partnering agencies. At the same time, the number of SUNY Cortland SL faculty and courses continues to increase:

- In spring 2005, 28 SUNY Cortland faculty taught 23 courses that use SL; in spring 2006, those numbers grew to 32 faculty teaching 30 SL courses, and more faculty are developing courses for the next academic year.
- Many of those are courses that will be paired with offerings in other disciplines. In fall 2006, for example, two Psychology 101 (General Psychology I) sections, dedicated to Psychology majors, will pair with CPN 102 (Academic Writing in the Community I). The instructors (Professor Peggy Anderson, Psychology Chair, and Laine Derr, English), expect their students to continue this collaboration into the spring semester with the subsequent course in each department.
- That collaboration exemplifies the range of opportunities available to SUNY Cortland students: service-learning courses are available from first year classes to graduate classes, and they are available in 14 departments that cover each of the college’s three schools.

Instructors who are interested in creating a service-learning course can apply for one of five $500 stipends offered by SUNY Cortland’s Institute for Civic Engagement. Please contact John Suarez, Coordinator of Service-Learning, at 753-2320 or at suarezj@cortland.edu for an application. Applications are due by Friday, May 12, 2006.

Whether you teach a service-learning course or you are interested in learning more about service-learning, please join SL folks at the following meetings:

- Shop Talk, Thursday, March 23, from 3 to 4 pm in Old Main’s Colloquium. This is an informal chat (no agenda, minutes, or committees) about SL topics raised by the participants.
- End-of-Semester Reflections on Service-Learning, Thursday, May 11, from 3 to 5 p.m. in Corey Union’s Fireplace Lounge. Participants will network and they will discuss “What Worked and What Didn’t” in SL during the Spring 2006 semester.

Please visit our continually evolving web site at http://www.cortland.edu/servicelearning/.

OTHER WEEKLY MEETINGS:

Student Government Association: Mondays @ 7:00 Corey Union Exhibition Lounge.

NYPIRG: Thursdays @ 6:00 NYPIRG office (215 Corey Union) www.nypirg.org

If you are interested in advertising an event through the American Democracy Project Newsletter, send information to Richard Kendrick at kendrickr@cortland.edu or Lauren Caruso at caruso24@cortland.edu. Information can also be sent to the Sociology/Anthropology Office at Cornish D-311 attn: American Democracy Project. Thank you for your support!