Post-SHINE: Taking the experience beyond the semester

By BETHANY RUNKEL

Well, here we are. Another semester of tutoring is over already. With hope, we have all reaped the many rewards that come with tutoring for Project SHINE. It’s easy to see from session to session how gratifying it is to be involved in this program. But I wonder, do we ever think about how Project SHINE can help us in the long run? Can it?

Who better to answer this question than a few Project SHINE alumnae? Brittney Smith, Jenna Brizek and Debra Lytle all tutored for SHINE at some point during their time in college and have since moved on to further their careers. Brittney was with SHINE for two years at Project Open Borders and Cardinal Bevilacqua. She is currently enrolled in Temple University’s five-year master’s program for education as well as student teaching at South Philadelphia High School and teaching one ESL class. Jenna, who tutored for SHINE for two and a half years (at the Mann Older Adult Center and at Coffee Cup), is currently living in California and working at the Converse International School of Languages in San Diego. Debra spent her eight months tutoring for SHINE at the Nationalities Senior Center and is now working for the Corporation for National and Community Service to recruit new AmeriCorps VISTAs.

So, has Project SHINE helped them?

“Yes, very much so,” Brittney says. “I was very prepared for teaching and creating lessons from my experience with Project SHINE.” Brittney gives many reasons why tutoring with SHINE is helpful for people who are going into the education field. “It gives you experience being in charge and standing in the front of a classroom even if it is only a class or a tutor session with one to two other people.”

Jenna agrees. She says, “At the institution where I work, we pride ourselves on providing personalized education -- this means no classroom will hold more than 8 students. Working with Project SHINE allowed me to get my feet wet, and definitely helped me land my first job after college.”

Brittney also touches on the value of tutoring for SHINE even if teaching ESL is not your ultimate goal. “If you plan to student teach or teach in the School District of Philadelphia you have a good chance of having an ESL class or an ESL student in one of your classes,” she says. “It’s nice to tell the students that you do have [that] experience and it looks good on your resume.”

It is clear that tutoring for SHINE can help you if you are an education major, but what about all the tutors who are not education majors? What about the business majors, the

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Expanding the future for tutors and elders

By BETHANY RUNKEL

Sitting in an extraordinarily comfortable chair next to a colorful wall-hanging in a small but welcoming office, I find myself laughing with Project SHINE’s Assistant Director Lillian Wu about a stuffed camel who sits on the table between us. I feel remarkably reassured by the fact that this animal is here; SHINE is in good hands.

Lillian and I begin by talking about the structure of SHINE. The acronym SHINE (Students Helping in the Naturalization of Elders) is the underlying drive of our conversation as we explore what Project SHINE is and begin discussing its future. Lillian tells me about SHINE’s position within the setting of Temple University, explaining that it is a part of the Center for Intergenerational Learning (CIL) which is in turn a department of Temple University’s College of Health Professions.

According to Lillian, there are three major areas into which Project SHINE invests its time and resources; citizenship preparation, health literacy and civic engagement. It is the second and third of those that lead Lillian and I into our discussion of SHINE’s future.

As Lillian says, until recently SHINE has been about college students helping immigrant elders, a very one-sided process. “You always hear what [the elders] need,” she remarks. “It’s always about what they don’t have enough of.” But now, SHINE wants to ask, “What do these elders contribute?” It has already become apparent to many SHINE faculty and tutors that the elders being tutored have many skills and abilities to contribute to their communities and in Lillian’s words, “reinvesting in the roles of the elders” has become one of the newest goals for Project SHINE.

A phone interview with the director of Project SHINE, Patience Lehrman, reinforced these ideas. Patience summed up continued on page 3

“Onions” without dictionaries

By MARY KASENCHAK

Around the middle of the semester while coaching at the Open Borders Project, one of the students, Carlos, stayed after class to take an evaluation. While he waited for the teacher to get the test together, he and I attempted some small talk to pass the time.

However, Carlos is one of the last advanced students in the class, so it was difficult for us to converse without the help of a Spanish-English dictionary, which had been taken home already by one of the other students. At this point, I really wished I had continued my Spanish education (or at least paid more attention in class).

I decided to try to speak with him anyway, since I figured it would be a great way to help him work on his conversational skills. I started out by telling him where I lived and who I lived with. That took a little bit, but eventually he understood. He then went on to ask me a question using a Spanish word I had never heard before. All I know that it sounded a lot like “onion.”

As he attempted to get his question across, he tried hand gestures, such as hugging himself, and said something about his brother. This was the first time I had ever engaged in a conversation that I literally could not sustain.

After exhausting all of our efforts, something he said finally registered in my mind as a word I could recognize. Suddenly, the conversation clicked and I realized that he was asking me if my roommates and I got along with one another. When I answered his question with an excited “yes,” he looked as if he had won the lottery. From that point on, we were able to continue our short conversation with much less difficulty.

This story sums up my favorite part about continued on page 4

Carrying SHINE’s benefits past school, continued from page 1

English majors or the pre-med students? Will tutoring for SHINE have any practical benefits for their future careers?

Debra, who in addition to being a tutor also served as SHINE’s Local Program Coordinator, has certainly found the program to be beneficial to her career. Debra says, “My experience recruiting new tutors for SHINE translated easily to my current work recruiting new volunteers for VIS- TA.”

Similarly, Brittney talks about how the experience of working with SHINE can be helpful for anyone. “It shows you a different dynamic of the city and another culture,” she says. “You never know what job situation you may be in but knowing a little about someone’s culture or background can go along way. It is also a very rewarding experience for anyone regardless of your major.”

Hearing about the benefits of Project SHINE from people who have done it and are experiencing the long-term benefits gives valuable insight. If you are unsure about how SHINE can help you, think again. It may be just the type of cultural experience you are looking for.
this shift in SHINE’s direction when she said, “We are being challenged to re-think SHINE’s name.” How can we take what has for so long been a one-sided service project and expand the elders’ roles in the mission of Project SHINE to make it more of a two-way process?

Through both interviews, I learned of several sub-projects of SHINE currently in the early stages of development which are geared toward strengthening the role of the elders as well as encouraging one of the three keystones of SHINE, civic engagement.

At Coffee Cup, one of SHINE’s tutoring sites, there is a new project underway involving a complete reversal of roles for both the elders and the tutors. Building off the idea of using the abilities of these elders, this project puts elders in the leadership role of Mandarin teachers to college students studying the language. Lillian comments on this new project, saying that “it is helping [the elders] find their voice again.” As she points out, immigrating to the United States is a difficult transition in many ways. Lillian also remarks that in moving to a new, unfamiliar country, “you lose so much more than your language.” And in Patience’s words, what is happening at Coffee Cup not only turns the system completely on its head, it also “marks a significant shift in SHINE’s direction.”

Another project which is aimed at engaging elders is a plan for forming intergenerational bilingual health literacy teams. Lillian explains that this synthesis of health literacy and civic engagement would create teams of retired healthcare professionals (immigrant elders who were doctors, nurses, EMTs, etc.) with bilingual college students (such as SHINE tutors) and support them in their efforts to combine their abilities in order to educate other elderly immigrants about healthcare, health insurance and other similar issues. Lillian remarks that the SHINE faculty “want the voices of elders and the students to come through directly” and whether it’s through creating pamphlets, leading educational programs or co-teaching ESL classes, this project seems to be an exciting and promising way to achieve exactly that.

Both Patience and Lillian expressed their anticipation and enthusiasm about the vast set of possibilities that face SHINE in the coming years. It is clear that the SHINE faculty are working to re-think the direction and goals of this program. “The potential is endless,” Patience comments, making sure that I understand how open the possibilities are for Project SHINE.

But of course, with new opportunities come new challenges. Patience suggests that “creating and maintaining viable partners which have a mutual appreciation for each other’s mission and work” is a challenge that is ongoing for SHINE and will surely be a part of its future. Without stable relationships with partners, Project SHINE, like every non-profit organization, will struggle to meet its goals. However, Patience points out the brighter side of such an obstacle. “Relationships are a challenge,” she says, “but they are also an opportunity to clarify our sense of direction.”

So until we meet the difficulties that will inevitably come in the next chapter of this program’s history, we as SHINE participants can be thankful for the success that we have already experienced as well as look forward to the possibilities of the future. Like the camel in Lillian’s office that stores fat in its hump for tough times, so we can lean on the relationships we already have with elders, students and staff to get us through whatever difficulties are sure to come our way next.

In March of this year, Project SHINE partnered with Coffee Cup Senior Center to begin a pilot project to engage immigrant elders as tutors of college students. Every Wednesday afternoon for eight weeks, seven Chinese elders and five Temple students meet at the American Postal Workers House at on Locust Street to practice Mandarin and learn about Chinese culture. Topics range from Chinese medicine, to Mandarin poetry and even calligraphy.

All five Temple students are either Intermediate or Advanced Mandarin learners. Elliott Smith, the Civic Engagement Coordinator for Project Shine, has attended every session. “The students really seem to enjoy practicing their Mandarin speaking skills and the elders love sharing their stories,” said Smith.

The project, part of SHINE’s Civic Engagement for All initiative, is funded by the MetLife Foundation. To learn more about Project Shine’s Civic Engagement visit Projectshine.org.
Media spotlight: Sin Nombre

By JULIA GOTTLIEB

The 2009 film Sin Nombre (Without a Name) is a dramatic thriller that delves deeply into the issue of illegal immigration. The film weaves two stories together. One plot line involves Sayra (Paulina Gaitan), a young woman from Honduras who joins her father and uncle on a journey through Guatemala and Mexico with the hopeful final destination being New Jersey. The other involves Willy (Edgar Flores), a young gang member from southern Mexico who robs those riding north on the tops of freight cars.

Writer/Director Cary Fukunaga began working on the film in 2005 after being inspired by a tragedy in Victoria, Texas, where 19 immigrants died inside of a refrigerated trailer. Fukunaga then spent two years in Mexico interviewing gang members in and out of prisons and immigrants from Nicaragua up to the Texas border.

“I hope that you can walk out of the theater having seen through the eyes of these gang members and immigrants with a sense of connection that you wouldn’t have imagined possible,” wrote Fukunaga in a personal statement to audience members.

Useful Phrases in Common Languages

SPANISH:
1. ¡Hola! (oh-la)
2. ¿Cómo está? (koh-mo ess-ta)
3. ¡Gracias! (grah-see-ahs)
4. ¡Bien hecho! (bee-en ae-cho)
5. Hasta la semana que viene. (ah-sta la sem-ah-na kay vee-en-ay)
6. ¡Adiós! (ah-dee-os)

VIETNAMESE:
1. Chào (chow)
2. Khoẻ Khỏng (kweh kowng)
3. Cám Oh (cam uhn)
4. Tốt (tote)
5. Hẹn Gặp Lại Tuần Sau (heng gupp lie too-uhn sow)
6. Chào (chow)

RUSSIAN:
1. Здравствуйте (Zdra-stvuj-te)
2. Как дела? (Kak de-la?)
3. Спасибо (Spa-si-bo)
4. Отличная работа (Ot-lich-na-ja ra-bo-ta)
5. Увидимся на следующей неделе (U-vi-dem-sja na sle-du-schej ne-de-le)
6. До свидания (Do sve-da-ni-ja)

MANDARIN:
1. 你 好 (ni hao)
2. 你 好 吗 (ni hao ma)
3. 谢 谢 (shie-shie)
4. 做 得 好 (zuo de hao)
5. 下星期见 (shia shin chee jan)
6. 再 见 (zai jan)

Onions, continued from page 2

my experience with Project SHINE. For me, there was no greater satisfaction than seeing the reaction of a student who finally feels understood. And what’s more, the discussion happened after class during a casual conversation he might have with any other person at any other time. Since the whole purpose of the class is to allow the students to gain the skills necessary for real-life exchanges and interactions, seeing that look on Carlos’s face in this context made it even more satisfying.

From that point on, Carlos and I sort of shared a special bond that I didn’t have with all of the other students, not just because he knew a little more about me but also because we had worked together to get to that point.

Not For Tourists

Tutoring Tips

• Greet your learners in their native language (see “Useful Phrases” at left). You’ll likely get lots of smiles.
• If you’re scheduled at the same time, travel with another tutor the first time you go to your site.
• Hit up the local locales: the used bookstore by Coffee Cup, Los Tacos by Open Borders, East Passyunk Ave. by SEAMAAC, etc.
• Be prepared to try new foods. Learners love to share their homemade goodies!
• Be consistent. Remember what you taught in prior classes.
• Make an effort to discuss current events. (elections, swine flu). Integrate (or make) them into your lessons.
• If you’re at a tutoring site, let learners know about the BEST test early on.
• Bike! It’s the cheapest and often the quickest method to get to many of the sites. It’s also a great way to tour the city once you’re comfortable with your site’s neighborhood.
• For sites further away, you can bring a bike with you on buses and the subway during non-peak hours.
• Tell students what they will be working on in the next class.
• Call SEPTA at 212-580-7800 if you’re lost and they can give you directions to anywhere in the city.