

State University of New York College at Cortland

- A President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll Member With Distinction
- Carnegie Foundation Elective Classification in Community Engagement

Institute for Civic Engagement

www.cortland.edu/get-involved

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SUNY Cortland Again Earns

Presidential Distinction for Community Service

By Michael Bersani, Public Relations staff writer.

SUNY Cortland recently won special recognition for its community engagement from President Barack Obama's 2012 Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll by being named to the Honor Roll with Distinction for the second year in a row.

The 2012 honor roll marked the sixth consecutive year SUNY Cortland won national recognition for its civic engagement programs and the second time the College received the elite "with distinction" designation.

Since 2006, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a federal agency that fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering, has presented the annual honor to colleges and universities to recognize exemplary community service. The corporation administers pro-

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Of the 642 schools recognized as honor roll members, 110 received distinction honors, including two other SUNY institutions. The full honor list is available from the CNCS. [www.nationalservice.gov/honorroll]

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The College's honor roll application highlighted six particular SUNY Cortland service programs: [Continued on page 4.]



Spotlight: AmeriCorps Member Amy Riotto

Renaissance woman Amy Riotto blends her background in Business Administration (48 credit hours), Recreation Leadership (AAS from Tompkins-Cortland Community College), and Early Childhood Education with her roles as a wife and mother (she has four children) into a career in Community Health.



Currently, this Randolph, NJ, native is a SUNY Cortland Early Childhood student. In December 2010, she started serving her first one-year contract as an AmeriCorps member at Seven Valleys Health Coalition (SVHC); currently, she is serving her second AmeriCorps contract at the Child Development Center. She is one of the college's current 40 AmeriCorps members.

In a June 2011 conversation with Dr. Bonni Hodges (Chair, SUNY Cortland's Health Department), Riotto described her previous ten years' community health activities. Based on that discussion, Dr. Hodges suggested that Riotto speak with Associate Professor Dr. Jena Curtis, who is responsible for helping health majors with career opportunities. A week later, they met.

Riotto says that forty-five minutes after she spoke with Dr. Curtis, "I was convinced that I will enroll in Community Health for my Master's Program."

One of the reasons why Dr. Hodges encouraged Riotto to speak with Dr. Curtis is that, for more than ten years, Riotto has been promoting community health programs by combining her skills in business administration with her entrepreneurial spirit, especially regarding ways in which parents learn about and have access to all of the health- and health education-related services in Cortland County.

For example, in January 2011, Riotto created *Health Happenings* while working at SVHC. The monthly

newsletter provides families with information about family-oriented health and fitness activities in Cortland County.

Health Happenings is emailed to over 30 employers, including the Cortland Regional Medical Center, Marietta, Ames Linen, and the Cortland County Community Action Program (CAPCO). Company and agency administrators e-mail the newsletter to their employees. The newsletter encourages employees to share the information with family members and friends.

Unlike the strong lines of communication between parents and the employers named above, parents' links with schools are often weak. Riotto points out that "unfortunately, there's often a disconnect between parents and school personnel.

"However, organizations such as Head Start/Early Head Start are doing a great job of linking parents and schools. Head Start does that in two ways." One is through "*Parent Activity Groups* [which] help teachers and parents share information about the curriculum and family-related issues, which is important because Head Start focuses on developing families' involvement in their children's education."

Through the meetings of Head Start's Parent Activity Groups and other community organizations, parents can understand the importance of programs such as Seven Valley Health Coalition's dental program, *Mighty Molar*.

Mighty Molar is an adult-sized tooth who (with friend Murray the Toothbrush) teaches good dental care habits to young children and to their families.

Another line of communication between parents and schools is the Policy Council, which is a unit of CAPCO that is composed of HS/EHS children's parents, members of the Cortland community, and a member of the CAPCO Board of Directors.

Riotto is the Board of Directors' representative on the Policy Council; in this way, she is further developing her role as community health advocate.

Parents occasionally have concerns other than health care, of course, and Riotto uses her business skills to help parents in this area also: In 2001, she and her mother created *OrganiCare* in Ithaca, NY, and brought the program to Cortland County in 2002. [Continued on page 3.]

Writing in the Digital Age: A Service-Learning Course for All Majors.

Literacy in the early 21st century includes skills in the use of digital communication technologies. *Writing in the Digital Age* (PWR 209, soon to be PWR 210) is one of the SUNY Cortland courses that provides students with such skills.

PWR 210 is a GE 12 (Science, Technology, Values and Society) course; as such, its goal is “for students to reflect critically on problems that involve ethical or values-based issues that arise at the interface of science and society.”

Assistant Professor Guiseppa Getto teaches PWR 210 as a team-based service-learning course in which students help agencies and organizations with their online projects.

Getto says that “service-learning helps facilitate team-based work and problem-solving, and it helps students identify issues of ‘power and privilege,’ which is important for students going into a variety of fields, from technology to teaching.”

To help prepare students for their interactions with agency supervisors (the students’ “clients”), Getto provides students with role-play activities in which students apply best practices.

After these activities, student teams contact agency and organization supervisors to discuss and conduct their projects. A critical role for students is that of technology trainer: students teach agency staff how to maintain and update the Websites and other tools that students have created for the agencies.

Some teams are creating webpages within which agencies such as Family Counseling Services and the YWCA can post videos and links to social media. Students, through their volunteering, help organizations to promote volunteering.

One team of four is helping SUNY Cortland graduate Kyle Brazeil develop his database for <http://ny.milesplit.com/>, a site at which student athletes, their parents, and their coaches can (among other activities) review school teams’ scores. The students are working to simplify content for the site, while eliminating redundancies in its information.

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OrganiCare offers workshops that help women survive separation and divorce with a series of five two-hour sessions in which women can discuss issues with female professionals, such as a lawyer, a financial consultant, a tax consultant, and a counselor. These professionals provide their services for free, as the entire program is free to the women participants.

OrganiCare meetings are designed to help women to feel safe when speaking or when not speaking. Between 2001 and 2003, about 65 women participated. Funding was through a Cortland YWCA grant, but the grant ended. Riotto is searching for additional funding to restart the program.

While working on behalf of parents, Riotto has also been working for children: Since December 2011, she has served as the AmeriCorps member at the Child Development Center (CDC) as a “floating sub”

One of Getto’s students, professional writing major Anna Coppola of Hyde Park, NY, is considering a career in grant-writing.

Coppola notes that the coursework “is very practical; you know how you will use this in the real world.” Part of the practical nature of the course, she says, “comes from the group work and our reflection on that work because we learn how to work together to make things happen.”

Another member of this team, New Communications Media major and Binghamton, NY, native Tommy Hancock, agrees that “the course is more realistic than others. We’re learning how to help identify problems and figuring-out how to solve them.”

Getto explained that students do so in part by writing reflections in which students “think about writing and write about thinking.”

In addition to Professional Writing majors, any SUNY Cortland major could benefit from PWR 210’s lessons, including Education majors, as evidenced by the *New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy*, which names digital communication skills as learning goals for children.

According to these Common Core Learning Standards, children in grades 9 and 10 must be able to “use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically” (p. 61).

Find additional information about the Common Core at http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/.

For more information about PWR 210, contact Professor Getto at guiseppa.getto@cortland.edu or visit him online at <http://www.guiseppegetto.com>.

For more information about service-learning in teacher education, contact Office of Service-Learning coordinator John Suarez @ john.suarez@cortland.edu or at (607) 753-4391.

in the facilities’ seven rooms that are dedicated to infants to pre-kindergarten children.

In her AmeriCorps role, Riotto is providing “added value” by drawing on her recreation leadership expertise to develop a gross-motor program and a culturally diverse education program for the Center.

She is also coordinating the CDC booth at *Kidsville*, an April 21st event designed primarily (though not exclusively) for children ages two to five. *Kidsville*’s theme this year is “Reaching for the Stars.” This year’s CDC booth has an additional theme: Earth Day.

Kidsville will run from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the County Office Building gymnasium. It is free and open to the public.

For further information about *Kidsville* or any of the other programs described above, contact Riotto at amy.riotto@cortland.edu.

[Continued from page 1.]

- The SUNY Cortland AmeriCorps program, which completed its third year in 2010-11, served 13 community agencies.
- The Cortland Migrant Education Outreach Program (MEOP), which served nearly 16,000 meals as part of an alliance between the Central New York Food Bank. MEOP is housed at the college, and is administered through its School of Education.
- Cornell Cooperative Extension's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA); it provided many low-income families tax relief. Eleven SUNY Cortland students provided 1,320 hours of service.
- Cortland's Urban Recruitment of Educators (C.U.R.E.) program, in which future teachers tutored and mentored 200 students from the Syracuse (N.Y.) City School District.
- League 56 Academy, an after school program that combats the effects of bullying among 5th and 6th graders. SUNY Cortland students and faculty from the Recreation, Parks and Leisure Studies Department helped Cortland Junior/Senior High School run the program.
- Family Counseling Services, whose three Youth Assist programs helped improve children's academic performance and social skills. 74 SUNY Cortland students provided 1,570 volunteer hours.

As part of the Honor Roll application, the college must demonstrate its commitment to its civic engagement activities, and its participation in organizations that support and sustain civic engagement.

To those ends, the Institute for Civic Engagement actively pursues external support for its programs. During the 2010-11 academic year, SUNY Cortland obtained a \$370,000 one-year supplemental grant from the CNCS to support the fourth year of its AmeriCorps program.

Its work is also supported by the Bringing Theory to Practice project and by a Congressionally-directed earmark administered through the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education.

The college is a charter member of New York Campus Compact, and continues to participate in the American Democracy Project. We are also members of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (with which Bringing Theory to Practice is affiliated).

"The work that the Institute for Civic Engagement does isn't possible without the relationships the College has formed with its community partners," Kendrick said. "This award is a tribute to the best that our faculty, staff, students and community members have to offer."

"In many ways, SUNY Cortland's outreach efforts have become a blueprint for other SUNY institutions to follow."

Increasing the number of campuses to make the President's honor roll each year is a metric used by the SUNY Report Card [www.suny.edu/powerofsuny/reportcard/] to measure the system's success toward enhancing vibrant communities across New York.

The honor roll is jointly sponsored by the CNCS, through its Learn and Serve America program, and the Department of Education, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation.

For more information, visit the CNCS website. [www.nationalservice.gov]

Physical Activity Opportunity for SUNY Cortland Mentors and Their Mentees

SUNY Cortland students who serve as mentors for Cortland County children sometimes search for activities in which their young charges can be physically active.

Julian Wright, SUNY Cortland's Director of Recreational Sports, has offered a solution to this dilemma: He is offering an opportunity for SUNY Cortland mentors and their mentees to enjoy Moffett Gym's Open Recreation sessions and the college's racquetball courts on Saturdays and Sundays, at no charge to the children.

(SUNY Cortland students, of course, can already do so at no charge.)

The plan will begin in fall 2012.; details will be announced at the beginning of that semester.

For further information, contact the Institute for Civic Engagement's program coordinator, Ashley Aurilio, at ashley.aurilio@cortland.edu, or at (607) 753-4271.