Heather Taylor partners with Hathaway-Sycamores, a mental health services provider.
In a strategy called *Engaged Scholarship*, UCLA’s Center for Community Partnerships provides grants to support projects that mobilize the resources of a major research university to meet needs in the broader community. In an important by-product, the program provides significant benefits for graduate students.
A typical community partnership teams UCLA faculty with community agencies that share an area of interest. For example, Dr. Joan Asarnow, Professor of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Science, is the principal investigator in a research project on adolescent depression and suicide; Hathaway-Sycamores is the largest nonprofit child and adolescent mental health agency in Los Angeles County. Information gathered at Hathaway-Sycamores advances Dr. Asarnow’s research, and her analysis may help the agency improve its services.

In addition, Heather Taylor, a third-year graduate student in clinical psychology, received partial support and valuable experience for her work conducting interviews with clients and staff at Hathaway-Sycamores. Two other graduate students also participated in meetings.

Pragmatically speaking, more than half a million dollars has been funneled to 121 graduate student researchers through community partnerships sponsored by UCLA in LA since 2002. Some graduate students have used their work to meet academic requirements or to further their dissertation research. Participation is also a way to explore potential careers and learn skills that will be useful, both in getting their degrees and in succeeding at subsequent jobs.

“When graduate students are learning how to do a project, to me, that’s when they learn how to do research,” says Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr., Associate Vice Chancellor for Community Partnerships and Professor of Political Science, the man in charge of these efforts. He coined the term discovery dialectic to describe what’s going on in the 100 or so community partnerships that UCLA has funded so far.

The land-grant institutions that were the precursors of today’s major state universities brought together scholars and farmers.

“Discovery often is a dialectic between theory and the real world,” he said. “What engaged scholarship is really about is the interplay between what we know as scholars and what practitioners and others know happens on the street.” Professor Gilliam pointed out that this is not an entirely new idea. In fact, the land-grant institutions that were the precursors of today’s major state universities brought together scholars and farmers.
At UCLA, either faculty or community agencies can apply for grants, which have ranged from $1,560 to $63,237, with a typical amount around $10,000 to $15,000. The grants are restrictive about how the money can be used, and a large portion has gone to graduate student support. The number of student participants in a single project has run as high as 22, although one or two is the norm. In the beginning, projects were funded for a single year, but two-year awards are now common.

UCLA’s program was the result of an initiative by former Chancellor Albert Carnesale. Early in its development, “trying to reach the next generation of scholars” by incorporating graduate students in projects became a declared goal, Professor Gilliam said. In the first year—the 2002 academic year—a number of grants went directly to graduate students. However, the program’s leaders became concerned that while graduate students offered “some really creative proposals,” not all of the projects involved research that would support the student’s academic progress. “We’ve found that the graduate student experience is more robust in the context of a faculty project that has some structure and parameters,” Professor Gilliam says. Although graduate student involvement is not a requirement for successful proposals, “a well-articulated role for graduate students is a bonus,” he adds.

Looking ahead, UCLA in LA is developing its own community project: an office in South Los Angeles to conduct research on the thematic undercurrent of our work is to encourage transdisciplinary work,” Professor Gilliam says.

“What engaged scholarship is really about is the interplay between what we know as scholars and what practitioners and others know happens on the street.”

Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr.

The following stories show how a sampling of community partnerships have contributed to their graduate student participants.

One student was particularly intrigued by the university-community collaboration. Although social justice and poverty are discussed at the university, “UCLA can seem so detached from Los Angeles at times,” Jennifer Musto says. “This kind of program lets you see how theories play out, how we can use our theories to improve the communities we live in.”

**Community Partners**

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has given UCLA its Community Engagement Classification, recognizing its outstanding community-based curricula, outreach, and partnerships. The Center for Community Partnerships (CCP) was an important contributor in UCLA’s effort to meet the Carnegie Foundation’s criteria. UCLA was the only university in the UC system to receive this honor.

The Center has developed an array of innovative programs designed to unite university resources with neighboring communities to improve the quality of life for residents throughout Los Angeles. In particular, CCP projects are focused on supporting children, youth, and families; fostering economic development; and enriching arts and culture. To date, CCP has facilitated and funded more than 100 projects involving UCLA faculty, staff, graduate students and nonprofit organization partners, totaling more than $2 million in private donations.

In addition to the community partnership grants described here, the center also convenes Community Knowledge Forums, directs an internship program, and awards the Rosenfield Distinguished Community Partnership Prize, which recognizes the most compelling partnerships.

“UCLA is in LA every day, in many ways, working to make life better for people and shedding light on those big questions that also are the responsibility of a world-class public research university,” said Frank D. Gilliam, Associate Vice Chancellor for Community Partnerships.
During an internship with the nonprofit Esperanza Community Housing Corp., Eric Schwimmer saw that the organization needed a way to build a working database from information its health promoters were gathering about the relationship between family health and slum housing conditions in a transitional area of South Los Angeles. Esperanza’s community health promoters had been “going door to door to collect information about the neighborhood”—especially about environmental issues such as the presence of mold and mildew or lead paint in the rundown housing common in the area, Eric says. They would do internal and external inspections and record demographic information about the household. However, “they didn’t have the technical skills to develop a good survey instrument, collect and use data efficiently, and build a database that was easy to use,” Eric says. “All of those things I was able to contribute.”

Professor Neal Richman suggested that Eric might apply for a community partnership grant to help meet the organization’s need—and at the same time, fulfill requirements for his master’s degree in urban planning. Eric submitted the work he did for Esperanza—supplemented by a descriptive and analytical report—in lieu of his master’s thesis, and he sees other ways that the project helped him.

“Writing a grant application forces you to be very, very clear about your objectives,” Eric said, “and that helps you to get the job done.” In contrast, some of his colleagues who wrote more traditional scholarly papers had trouble finding “a realistic chunk of material” to make the subject of their thesis.

Eric earned his master’s degree and left UCLA at the end of that first grant year, but Esperanza applied and won a new grant to educate its members so they could keep the project going without expert help. Eric worked as a consultant during twice-a-week classes at UCLA’s Labor Center in MacArthur Park, where community representatives mastered basic math skills and then branched out into data analysis and computer skills.

His experience with Esperanza gave him a new career goal. “I’d like to figure out how I can take this model and meet the needs of other organizations like Esperanza,” he said. “There’s such a need among community-based organizations to think strategically about how they can use data to develop power in their neighborhood.”
A S PART OF A COMMUNITY partnership between Dr. Joan Asarnow of UCLA and Hathaway-Sycamores, a mental health services provider, graduate student Heather Taylor is interviewing teenage clients who have attempted suicide in the last five years, along with their parents. Her questions: What services helped them? What strategies did they use during their recovery? What kinds of help would have been useful? How are they doing today?

“Conducting the interviews with youth and their parents has been an incredible experience,” Heather says. “They’ve been informative clinically, and I think it’s been a very positive experience for youth.”

Conducting these interviews as well as surveys of providers at the partner organization has provided Heather with a richer understanding of the needs of clients, families, and providers at a large community program. For instance, she has to clear a number of practical hurdles: connecting with the clinicians who must discuss the project with parents and youngsters, getting them to agree to the interviews, and then setting up an appointment.

To Dr. Asarnow, Heather’s sometimes frustrating experience means that one of her hopes for the community partnership is being realized: “creating students who have some grounding in what’s really out there.” As Dr. Asarnow sees it, “Exposure to the real world of clinical services” lets graduate students see the “real restraints and barriers as well as the pluses” of work in the field, she says. With this experience, students are better prepared not just for internships but also for their eventual careers. Besides Heather, two other UCLA graduate students have learned from the community partnership through meetings focused on developing optimal suicide and suicide attempt prevention strategies.

A third perspective on Heather’s experience is offered by Dr. Emily McGrath, a former UCLA graduate student and post-doctoral fellow who is now research director of Hathaway-Sycamores. “Building a partnership means working together in a flexible way that meets the needs of both the agency and the university,” she says. While she understands that Heather’s demanding academic schedule makes it hard for her “to get around the clients’ availability and clinicians’ work schedules,” Dr. McGrath also understands that “you can’t impose an academic structure onto research in a community mental health agency.”

Dr. Asarnow and Dr. McGrath have already realized benefits from the partnership. Parents and children say they need more time together during treatment after a suicide attempt, and previous interviews with staff at Hathaway-Sycamores showed that clinicians want more information and training, not only about suicide attempts, but also about adolescent self-harm—cutting, for example. Both findings have consequences for Dr. Asarnow’s research and Dr. McGrath’s practice.

As for Heather, besides the real-world experience she gained, she has also had an opportunity to present at conferences and is currently in the process of writing up the interview aspect of the project for publication. She also received a 25% graduate student researcher stipend for the 10 hours of work she did each week in the grant year, as well as tuition and registration fees.
When Carrie Petrucci was a doctoral student in social welfare at UCLA in 2000, she sat in on a couple of meetings with Professor of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Science Belinda Tucker and others who were considering a study on how the incarceration of sons, brothers, and fathers affects families. Though their efforts continued, the project they anticipated never got off the ground.

Then, earlier this year, Professor Tucker called Dr. Petrucci to say that funding for such a project might be available through UCLA in LA’s community partnership grants. As it happens, Dr. Petrucci was already consulting with the perfect partner for such a study: Friends Outside, a 52-year-old nonprofit whose Los Angeles chapter was founded by a UCLA alumna, Martha Jane Dowds.

Friends Outside provides a range of services to inmates, ex-inmates, and their families. Through interviews with families, the researchers hope to describe the psychosocial impacts of incarceration on adult family members and close ties of inmates, identifying specific risks and protective factors.

Mary Weaver, the current Friends Outside director, believes the study will help tailor services for maximum impact and strengthen her proposals to funding sources: “It’s all about outcomes—being able to prove that what you’re doing is working,” she says.

Meantime, former doctoral student Carrie Petrucci will be working with two current graduate students—Gwendelyn Rivera and Neva Pemberton—and Tucker and Weaver to gather and analyze the data. The current graduate students will do the qualitative interviews, including open-ended questions about how families are impacted. “I wish it could be me,” Dr. Petrucci says.
Brette Steele & the Western Justice Center

Graduate student participants in community partnerships may find themselves playing a central role in creating and implementing projects.

BRETTE STEELE WAS ONLY 18 when she became a state-certified mediator, and she worked at Small Claims Court all the way through her undergraduate years at UC Berkeley—where she also mediated disputes in the residence halls. By the time she arrived at UCLA for law school, mediation was at the heart of her career goals.

During an orientation session, she met Mary Nichols, director of the Institute of the Environment, who told her about a proposal to partner with the Western Justice Center to create an Environmental Mediation Center that would help resolve conflicts, especially in low-income neighborhoods. While that proposal was being considered, Brette became a summer fellow at the Western Justice Center, looking at model mediation centers around the country, developing a model for Southern California, and designing a training program for potential mediators.

When the UCLA in LA grant was approved, its focus had changed from creating a new center to training potential mediators. Brette “was the natural choice” for the job, and she spent the grant year preparing for a training session that created 30 new mediators to help in neighborhood disputes. The Western Justice Center has now hired a project coordinator to develop a framework in which the mediators can work.

If you ask Brette what she got out of her participation, “a large portion of last year’s tuition” is just the start. She also got five units of credit, using her research on the mediation model for a paper in a course called “Social Welfare.” To balance the law school’s focus on adversarial processes, she had “a facilitated opportunity to work with a collaborative system,” Brette says, and “also an incredible experience being at the ground level of the institutional cooperation to create a new project.”

The professional experience “is incredibly valuable,” she says, and the contacts she made didn’t hurt, either. This summer, she’ll take a position as clerk to Judge Dorothy Wright Nelson of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. As it happens, Judge Nelson founded the Western Justice Center; her former colleagues no doubt gave Brette an excellent reference.
Novice Teachers & the Museum of Tolerance

Community partnership grants may result in outcomes that generate long-lasting ripples of change in the Los Angeles area.

The Mission of the Teacher

Education Program (TEP) at UCLA is to “radically improve urban schooling for California’s racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse children.” Not surprising, then, that the Museum of Tolerance would seek TEP as a collaborator in developing tolerance-focused curricula for Los Angeles public schools—and not surprising that the program eagerly accepted the challenge.

“It was a good marriage,” says Nancy Parachini, faculty leader for the project. The community partnership gave students “practice in an aspect that we highlight, which is how to be a social justice teacher” and helped “students to define for themselves what this means,” she adds.

In the project’s first phase, 22 novice teachers prepared lesson plans linked to the Museum’s “Finding Our Families, Finding Ourselves” exhibit, adapting the themes to the elementary and middle school classes they were teaching in South Los Angeles.

For example, novice teacher Huy Chung discussed the Watts riots with his fifth-grade class at the 92nd Street Elementary School, focusing on how African American and Korean families were affected and how they came together to help each other. In a related activity, each student made a construction paper strand to represent a member of his or her family, and the strands were woven together in a quilt.

In the project’s second phase, nine of the original participants—now resident teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District—are building a handbook around the lesson plans for use by their fellow LAUSD teachers.

Participating teacher Michael Nemoroff says the project “made me realize how little I took the students’ personal history and background into consideration while teaching. I need to focus my lessons and make them relevant to students’ lives and experiences.”

Work on the handbook is well under way, with a target completion when the grant ends in June, and hundreds of LAUSD teachers stand to benefit. Parachini is pleased with the outcome: “a richer, more thoughtful environment for our students and for their students.”
The connection created between graduate students and community agencies may have impacts that last well beyond the life of the grant.

An ardent opponent of human trafficking and a big fan of dance, Professor Kenneth Chuang was a man with a mission the day he walked down the hallway of Kaufman Hall and knocked on the door of Professor Victoria Marks’s office. What he proposed was not just a collaboration of his Neuropsychiatric Institute with her Department of World Arts and Cultures but also a partnership between UCLA and CAST, the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking.

Professor Marks’s research has involved what she calls “choreo-portraiture” a process of staging identity through movement that may involve people who do not identify as dancers. Professor Chuang thought this technique might be useful with CAST’s resident clients—women who have been rescued—and the agency was interested.

The initial outcome was a two-quarter, graduate-level course. A first-quarter seminar gave students a background on human trafficking, a complex problem that includes not only the headline-grabbing sex trade but also domestic and agricultural work. Toward the end of the quarter, there was “time for students to think about ways to interact with that community through the arts,” Professor Marks says. In the next quarter, they implemented their projects.

Jennifer Musto, a doctoral student in Women’s Studies, partnered with Indira Tyler, a senior undergraduate who was a professional choreographer. The two women spent the course’s second quarter doing dance and yoga with the clients, and “while they were moving together and laughing together, stories came out,” Jennifer says. She and Indira turned these stories into a performance, which the residents reviewed and edited. Then the UCLA students performed at a trafficking symposium and the Vitas Film Festival, both hosted by the Department of World Arts and Culture.

Besides her interaction with CAST and its clients, Jennifer learned something about “how this organization works and how they’re dividing time between advocacy and social services,” information that may be an important part of her dissertation on how non-governmental organizations have been key players in the anti-trafficking movement.

Clients at CAST also benefited from the student projects, which also included sessions in which residents cooked and shared their native foods, said executive director Kay Buck; “Not only did they have fun, but they also learned some new skills.” As a result, Ms. Buck says: “What we learned as an organization is that the arts can be a fantastic healing medium.”

Several months after the community partnership ended, Jennifer returned to CAST with Amy Campion, who has an MFA in World Arts and Culture from UCLA. In response to a continuing interest among CAST clients, Amy leads dance—salsa is a favorite—and yoga workshops. Jennifer also participates, looking for ways to “fuse dance and client narratives to express their experiences and further aid in their healing,” Jennifer says. Their work “is generating opportunities for clients to creatively express themselves, which we hope to be able to share with the community in future performance pieces.”