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Student Life

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Literacy Alliance

Cuzzi '98 develops service-learning and literacy programs for students

By Alicia Nemiccolo MacLeay '97

Volunteering with the Oakland, Maine, Police Department while a student at Colby revealed some of the afflictions of poverty and illiteracy to Michael Cuzzi '98. He said he was shocked to learn that "some people couldn't even write out a statement."

These experiences helped steer him to his present calling—trying to eliminate illiteracy through volunteerism. When Colby became the three-year host to an AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) leadership position for literacy last year, Cuzzi applied, was selected and committed to a year of service.

A domestic Peace Corps, VISTA was developed in 1964 to place volunteers in full-time, year-long programs to help find solutions to problems caused by urban and rural poverty. Since beginning the job last summer, Cuzzi has placed student volunteers in local nonprofit groups and public agencies and has facilitated Colby-Waterville service programs. One of Cuzzi's responsibilities is designing programs that will continue after he has finished his VISTA service.

America Reads, a national literacy initiative, is one of the programs in which Cuzzi places student volunteers. Even though literacy volunteer opportunities have existed through Colby's Volunteer Center for years, Cuzzi offered literacy work as a paid work-study option to students who otherwise might not have been able to afford getting involved. He makes sure volun-

teers are adequately trained before they go out to tutor students in grades K-5 individually or in small groups.

Louise Harrington, a fifth grade alternative education teacher at the Albert S. Hall School, is one of the community members who has seen the benefits of AmeriCorps*VISTA's first year in Waterville. She calls the partnership a wonderful thing for everyone involved. Elementary school students at risk of falling through the cracks receive additional adult attention, and the Colby volunteers "bring youth and energy into the school," Harrington said. "It's invaluable to the kids."

The program benefits the school staff as well. Thanks to the organization and structure provided by Cuzzi, the program doesn't take any effort on the teachers' part, Harrington says. The Colby students are extremely professional and dedicated. "It's a win-win situation," she said. Colby students benefit by becoming more aware of the need to get involved in social programs in their communities, and they gain experience presenting lesson plans and instructing. As proof of the tutoring program's success, Harrington says student reading levels have risen.

Cuzzi also helped integrate community service into the first-year English composition courses of professors Peter Harris, Jean Sanborn and David Suchoff. Through Cuzzi's placements, first-year students worked two hours a



Literacy volunteers, including Anna Randall '01, have improved reading levels at the Albert S. Hall School in Waterville.

week at volunteer sites including the local women's center, an adult day care, the Waterville Boys & Girls Club, Waterville Head Start, the homeless shelter, a soup kitchen and the junior high school. A major goal of VISTA is to design service-learning partnerships like these that build on the strengths of the community and address significant social problems.

With Cuzzi's assistance Lyn Mikel Brown (education) developed a mentor program between girls in area middle and junior high schools and students in Brown's course Women, Girls and the Culture of Education. Every student in Brown's class was paired with a "little sister" during the program's inaugural year. The Colby mentors met weekly with their students, and Brown says the relationships forged this past year will con-

tinue through meetings and correspondence.

Cuzzi's commitment to social service extends to the difficult but necessary task of fund raising. He has secured funds from the local Lions Club and book donations from Amazon.com on behalf of Waterville Head Start's "Knapsacks of Knowledge," a family literacy program. At their Family Literacy Day awards ceremony in May, Head Start recognized Cuzzi, his corps of service-learning volunteers and his fund-raising alliance.

After such success in the first year of the VISTA position, Cuzzi agreed to continue developing his programs for another year. He wants to maintain the solid base of local partnerships he developed and add others where he and the Colby community see a need. ♦

Deflating Internet Stocks

A letter to the editor in the April 30 *Wall Street Journal* signed "Sunil H. Thakor, Senior, Colby College, Waterville, Maine," used a pithy analysis to put a pin in the overblown Internet stocks sector. Thakor, responding to a *WSJ* columnist, posited that the Internet is the most perfect competitive environment ever. "Any economist will be quick to point out that in the face of perfect competition, economic profit is driven to zero," he wrote. "To enter this marketplace is to forfeit all pricing power and become a price taker."

So what does that mean to investors? "I would argue that paying 500 times earnings for a company that provides a generic service (like Internet access) or sells the same product (like books) that countless other firms sell is foolish.... To believe heavily in Internet retailers and the like is to ignore the fundamental economic principles that govern this new marketplace," he concluded.

Two weeks later the Binghamton, N.Y., *Press & Sun Bulletin* praised "the Colby College student who made this convincing argument against high internet stock valuation using sound economic and business principal(sic) reasoning." ♦

Recommended Reading

What are the Class of '99's favorite books? For the third year the seniors sent in their preferences, solicited faculty and staff picks and published a list of recommended reading (compiled this year by Jamie Smith '99).

A Prayer for Owen Meany, by John Irving, was the seniors' most popular title with eight recommendations; *Ishmael*, by Daniel Quinn, had seven. Evidence that the Ayn Rand revival made it to Colby consists of three recommendations for *The Fountainhead* and three for *Atlas Shrugged*. Other books that garnered more than two student recommendations: *Beloved*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* and *The Great Gatsby*.

An Excellent Ally

Julia McDonald '99 says she realized early that she was likely to get as much out of Colby as she put into it. And put into it she did. She was a member of SHOC (Student Health on Campus), president of The Bridge, accompanist for the Colby Chorale, Powder and Wig trouper, HIV Task Force member, senior art show exhibitor, Colby dancer and captain of the woodmen's team. She engineered successful visits of The Starving Artists theater company, and she was a prominent voice in College affairs.

Among her contributions, the highest profile legacy is Project Ally—a program to promote awareness and non-judgmental treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual and questioning people.

McDonald and others decided it was time to make a small part of Maine—Mayflower Hill—as free from homophobia as possible. The national program they liked best is called Project Safe Zone. The problem with Project Safe Zone was that



Julia McDonald '99

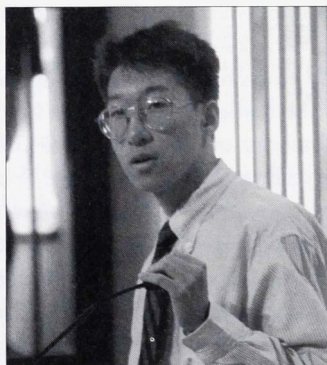
it implied that unsafe spaces exist at Colby, McDonald says. So, working with a committee of students and staff, she helped create a unique Colby program and named it Project Ally.

Training sessions to mobilize a network of informed and sympathetic allies were held this spring and will be repeated next year for students, faculty and staff. Besides educating allies, the program has the goal of producing signs of support for gay people on campus and helping to bring a long-invisible group more into the mainstream of campus life. "So far support has been tremendous and we have high hopes for this project," McDonald told the Campus Community Committee. ♦

Sharing the Spotlight

During his unprecedented three years as Student Government Association (SGA) cultural chair, Walter Wang '99 lined up a distinguished roster of campus speakers, including civil rights lawyer Morris Dees, former Polish president Lech Walesa, American Civil Liberties Union president Nadine Strossen, Nobel Peace Prize winner Oscar Arias and author Iris Chang. But of all the programs he organized, Wang considers date-rape survivor and activist Katie Koestner's crusade against sexual assault the most powerful—"because it's an important topic and it doesn't get talked about much. It has everything to do with feeling safe on campus."

Wang ran for the position as a first-year student after organizing a successful Asian New Year's festival as his dorm's cultural chair. His vision for cultural programming is inclusive, and he encourages a broad



Walter Wang '99

view. "I try to do something with science, technology, student plays and international issues—some things students don't get in the classroom," he said.

Despite his success in the position, playing campus host to ambassadors and booking Nobel laureates wasn't Wang's biggest Colby achievement, he says. Working as a research assistant for Associate Professor of Government Suisheng Zhao was: "That really defines the Colby experience—close contact with a professor from freshman year. That's remarkable."

If he could have brought absolutely anyone to Colby, Wang would have chosen Joe DiMaggio. "It's not just that I'm a New York Yankees fan," the New Jersey resident said. Characterizing DiMaggio as an average guy who achieved the American dream, Wang said, "America provides you the opportunity to succeed, but doesn't guarantee that you will succeed." ♦