SAIL-Summer Academy to Inspire Learning

Back in 2005, the UO was debating heavily about how to address diversity on campus. Economists Bruce Blonigen and Bill Harbaugh decided to do something concrete, and the department started its Summer Academy to Inspire Learning (SAIL) to address diversity from a socioeconomic standpoint. The SAIL program collaborates with local high schools encouraging students who are academically promising and who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program to attend college by showing them what university life is like. Our free summer camps run one week every summer throughout a student's high school career. SAIL now offers academic mentoring throughout the school year to all of our SAIL students in the various local high schools.

Since the summer of 2005, SAIL has grown from fifteen high school students to 150, one camp to eight, and from ten faculty volunteers to more than 100. Currently, SAIL is seeking sophomore-through-senior-level UO students to act as college prep mentors for our SAIL participants. This is a fantastic way for UO undergraduates to build interpersonal and organizational skills, and the experience is something that can really shine on a résumé. SAIL camps offer include performing arts, psychology, biology, physics, physiology, journalism, international studies, economics and forensics. We pride ourselves in the amount of faculty members who volunteer their time and feel a sense of pride in doing so.

SAIL has become the face of outreach for the UO community. Our program has shown it does indeed affect our community as well as other universities, who have contacted us to inquire about how to set up similar programs at their schools. Portland State University started a branch of SAIL in 2011 and this year served thirty-eight students in Portland area. In 2011, we had nineteen seniors graduate high school with seventeen enrolling into higher education—seven at the University of Oregon, with
We had five PhD students complete their doctoral training over the past year. While they will be missed, we are pleased that they did well in last year’s job market. All five began academic careers this fall, with Hui-Hsuan “Sandy” Tang, Matthew Taylor, and Brian Vander Naald starting their careers as assistant professors at National Taipei (Taiwan) University, the University of Montana, and the University of Alaska Southeast, respectively. Also, Donghyun “Don” Lee is a visiting professor at Colby College and Thomas Groll is a lecturer at Columbia University this year. Our master’s graduates also placed well across a variety of positions, including a business analyst at Capital One, a research analyst at United Way, and a lecturer at Ningbo University in China.

Recent gifts have also allowed us to reward our top first-year PhD students (Colin Corbett and John Voorheis this year) and some modest summer support for first-year students who successfully pass their comprehensive exams. One of our PhD students, Benjamin Fitch-Fleischmann, also won the Graduate School’s Dan Kimble First-Year Teaching Award. Finally, we were able to fund travel for ten of our graduate students to present their research at conferences across the country from Boston to Tucson to Miami. Such conferences are invaluable opportunities for them to gain professional experience and network. This too, is funded in part by a donor gift funded by Beatrice Aitchison many years ago.

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four students placing in the College Scholars program and one (currently studying in Chile) in the international program. In fall 2012, the UO is welcoming four SAIL graduates, one of which is the university’s only Gates Mellenium Scholar to enroll at the UO this year.

We were quite inspired by the following note from the parents of one of our SAIL students:

“You should know that SAIL is not only responsible for our daughter attending college, but because of her ease and comfort with the campus (and our knowledge by proxy) my husband and I returned to college (UO) and finished our degrees, something we never dreamed we’d do. SAIL provided us as parents with visits to campus, and our excited daughter took us on numerous private tours, which familiarized us with the school and made us realize this was something we could really do. We will forever be indebted to SAIL and its creators for setting off this chain reaction and life-changing path the program set our entire family on.”

Please contact Lara Fernandez, executive director for SAIL at laraf@uoregon.edu or 541-346-8378 with any questions or ideas! Cheers!