

ASU unveils master's degree in social justice and human rights

By Matt Crum

People who aspire to apply social justice and human rights approaches to such issues as health, education, labor, international development, family welfare and the environment will gain a strong theoretical background and hands-on management skills through ASU's new master's degree program in social justice and human rights.

The program welcomes its first group of students to the West campus in August, when the fall semester begins. Inquiries from potential students have come from Arizona and across the United States as well as countries including Ethiopia, Pakistan, Nepal, the Dominican Republic and Kenya.

"This program is unique in course design and content," says William Simmons, the director of the new master's degree program.

Simmons is an assistant professor of social and behavioral sciences in ASU's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences.

Students will choose from two tracks. Those pursuing the social justice and human rights research track will be prepared for careers requiring research skills in governmental and non-governmental agencies. Graduates from this track also are prepared for doctoral programs in the social sciences and law.

The non-governmental organization (NGO) management track combines coursework in social justice and human rights with practical training in nonprofit management. Graduates are prepared for leadership posi-

tions in the rapidly growing NGO sector.

"The need in this area is huge," Simmons says. "Statistics from 2006 show more than 12,000 charitable nonprofit organizations in Arizona, with the majority in Maricopa County. Social justice and human rights issues are major components of the mission of many of these organizations."

C. T. Wright lent his expertise to ASU professors who designed the new master's program. Wright is founder of the Light of Hope Institute, which promotes human rights around the world. He is the former president and chief executive officer of the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help, and the former president of Cheyney University in Pennsylvania.

"This program will provide students with the ability to conceptualize and analyze issues confronting civil society," Wright says. "Graduates will be equipped to plan, implement, manage and evaluate programs at local through international levels. They also will be prepared to conceptualize and write proposals, develop budgets and communicate with people from diverse backgrounds."

Simmons says much of the international interest in the new master's program comes from people already working for NGOs who want to improve their leadership and management skills. Working professionals will be able to come to metropolitan Phoenix for nine months (August to May) to complete most of the program. They can finish their degree requirements at their places of work, regardless of location.

While most courses in the program will be taught at the West campus, students also can take advantage of courses and resources offered by programs at other ASU campuses such as the **Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Non-profit Innovation**, headquartered on the Downtown Phoenix campus, and the School of Justice & Social Inquiry on the Tempe campus.

"This is truly an interdisciplinary effort, with faculty involvement from all four colleges on the West campus and a tremendous spirit of cooperation among campuses," Simmons says.

Many courses will be solution-based, with students and faculty working together to address real-world issues that can change from semester to semester. For example, New College associate professor Julie Murphy Erfani has become familiar with an indigenous village in Mexico that is facing environmental impacts from a nearby mining operation. This fall, Murphy Erfani and students in her class will research the situation from political, historical and legal perspectives, with assistance from faculty members in a range of disciplines. The end result will be reports that students will present to the residents of the village, addressing actions they may wish to take.

Other courses will place students with local agencies, providing a benefit to those agencies while broadening students' knowledge base. Additionally, students will complete a course in grant writing, a skill Simmons considers indispensable for researchers and those employed in NGOs.

Students will work with faculty members to

design and complete a capstone project that draws on the knowledge and experiences they gain in the program. Capstone projects may include traditional theses, legal briefs, drafting of legislation or policy statements, developing strategic plans for community organizations, or public art projects.

"Adding this dynamic degree program is an exciting development for ASU," says Elizabeth Langland, dean of the New College.

Social justice and human rights is the second graduate degree offered by New College. It joins the master's degree in interdisciplinary studies, which enables students to design their own unique programs of study. After introductory graduate courses in interdisciplinary studies, models of inquiry for the 21st century, and critical thinking, these students move on to concentrations in applied arts, English language studies, digital media and visual cultures, nonprofit and civic leadership, women's studies and electives from the wide spectrum of disciplines in New College.

A capstone experience concludes the interdisciplinary studies master's degree program, which can be pursued on a full-time or part-time basis.

Details about these master's degree programs are available by visiting the Web site <http://newcollege.asu.edu/programs> or by sending an e-mail to NewCollegeGrad@asu.edu.

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