

Obies Recognized for SITES Program

By Laura Boffa

When Hispanic Studies Professor Kim Faber proposed to her Linguistics for Language students that they teach Spanish in elementary school classrooms, their eager response was "Yes! We want this!" Since starting the Spanish In The Elementary Schools program last fall, Faber has gotten similar responses from elementary school faculty, parents and students.

After one year of successful implementation, the SITES program will receive the Civic Engagement Advocate Award of the Center for Service and Learning. The CSL, which also honored the program with a Learn and Serve America grant last spring, is honoring SITES for encouraging student-community partnership. The award will be presented at the CSL end-of-the-year banquet this coming Tuesday.

"I believe that sharing language is one of the deepest ways that we can help to empower each other, teach each other about ourselves, even rescue each other from tough situations," said College junior Amelia Graber, a student teacher in the program.

Participants share language by visiting four Eastwood Elementary kindergarten classes and four Prospect Elementary third grade classes. At least two participants are assigned to teach the half-hour lessons once a week.

According to Faber, it is the only existing program in the country in which college students volunteer to teach Spanish in elementary classrooms. Although she started it

because she wanted her son, an Eastwood first-grader, to be exposed to a language in school, she can also see the positive effects it has had on the students who are teaching.

"Both of the schools are raving about it, parents are raving about it, the kids, the student teachers," Faber said. "Everyone's very excited."

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Student teachers receive twelve hours of training each semester. They post lesson plans on Blackboard to share ideas and receive feedback. In the classrooms, they play games with the students and teach them basic Spanish such as numbers, days of the week, weather and body parts.

The program has already begun to expand. Student participation is increasing as word is spreading about the program. Even beginning-level Spanish students are able to climb on board. Two students have combined their interests in psychology and Spanish and are using the project as research.

College senior Carmen Welton extended SITES by initiating

Saturday classes for three- to ten-year-olds at the Oberlin Public Library. Superintendent Geoffrey Andrews of Oberlin City Schools has encouraged adding classes as well.

College junior and student-teacher Alia Kate said, "Beyond what we teach the kids in terms of Spanish, it forges a stronger bond between Oberlin College and the community. Anytime a program can do that, especially in Oberlin, I think it's really honorable."

Faber hopes that SITES will emerge from the "grassroots program" that it is now into something bigger. An official class for student teachers could establish a connection with the College that would greatly help to facilitate growth. Currently, SITES has no official affiliation with Oberlin College, which makes it difficult for students to get course credit for the time they put into the program.

The elementary school has emphasized that one area of growth in the coming years might be to institute a system to help improve standardized test scores and reading comprehension, as research has shown that learning a second language can help with both. A survey of community parents showed that they overwhelmingly wanted Spanish as the language to be introduced to their children.

"This is Oberlin. This is exactly the kind of thing that Oberlin should be behind and believing in," Faber said. "Our slogan is 'Do you believe one person can change the world?' Well, these people are changing it."