**Balancing Academics and Activism: Student Testimonials**

**September 2012**

When students first get inspired to do social justice work they often find an incredible energy and enthusiasm that can help motive them in everything they do. But most also find it hard to achieve balance in their lives. The more you know about the problems of the world, the more you feel like you *should* do. And the more skills you have to make a difference, the more you know you *can* do. That ability to make a real difference can feel great. But it can also lead to burnout, bad grades, and no time for the things that sustain you in life, like strong personal relationships, sleep, and exercise.

The ICCE is committed to helping grow students in their capacity to building a better world and to prepare them to do that work, wherever they go, for the rest of their lives. It is hard to sustain a life of commitment to social justice goals, if you don’t also make good progress in getting through school and if you don’t learn to take good care of yourself.

We asked student organizers, who had applied for our Student Leadership Award to tell us how they managed to balance their organizing work with their school work. Here are their words of wisdom:

*I have not fully balanced my academic life and activism, but it is one of my biggest challenges and something that I constantly try to improve on. Activism is what I love to do, but I also understand that to reach my goals I must also try to be a good student and commit to my education and learning, so I can better teach and help others. So far I feel as if I have improved over the years of fighting for this balance that so many of us wish to have, and I am happy with my progress but sometimes doubt my motivation when it comes to my priorities and commitments to either one of these. I am aware of what I need to work on, I believe I will never stop working on it, but as long as I improve, I believe that is success.*

- Shaila Ramos:

*I have managed to balance my academic progress and my activism by prioritizing. I have learned that it is best to manage my schedule such as, have certain days or hours for my studying as well as my activism. Although it may be difficult to balance both at times since both are extremely important to me; but what keeps me motivated to do my best in my academics is to continue to educate and prepare myself in order to achieve my career goal which is becoming an academic counselor so I can begin creating equal opportunities for my future students and community.*

- Claudia Barajas

*When it comes to studying, I usually have study groups and interact with all the people I met in extracurricular activities as well as in class. I feel I have good disciplined and time management skills in balancing my activities with academics. It shows in my GPA and awards that I have gotten in these activities. I make sure I take on what I know I can handle instead of spreading myself to thin.*

- Kurt Pham

*I tend to get classes that will enrich my spirit and curiosity. Those classes like for example the classes that are part of the leadership certificate at De Anza have the tools that will help me in activism and it tends to feel like Im just doing one thing as a whole. Learning in class and satisfying my curiosity then putting in practice with the activism.*

- José Armenta

*I’ve had good counseling, and time-management skills, and I find much of what I learn in the classes here goes hand-in-hand with the activism I engage in.*

- Kiyo Ouchida

*Balancing our time and prioritizing our activities is not something we are born with, but as we grow and learn from our mistakes we can become better and better at it. At the beginning of my involvement it was very hard for me to balance my education my activism and even my personal life because there are not enough hours in a day to do everything we would like to. As I got more involved and I started taking harder classes I learned that I have to give up something sometimes in order to have the best outcome. For example: if there is an event going on and I have a test the next day I have to think about the amount of hours I have to study and if I have some free time I can attend the most important part of the event. Also if I am in charge of a specific task and I am not able to attend I have to take the responsibility to make sure someone can complete my task and not let the people who are counting on me down. Even now after 3 years I am still learning.*

Angie Esquivel

*Personally I feel like becoming an activist students has help me improved academically because you get to explore new thing and you learned a lot . Many of my skills had been improve specially how to work with others and how to communicate better.*

-Lesly Escamilla

*I say “No” a lot. By this, I mean that I set boundaries in my life and try only to take on as much as I can do well. I strive to keep balance between family, school, work, activism and all the other shifting priorities I have in my life. I don’t have my balancing act perfected yet, because there are still days I feel overwhelmed when I look at my to-do list, but I’m getting there!*

-Luna Rivera Palacio

*Some of the main resources I rely on to balance my academic progress with my efforts have been my family, my course instructors, student supporters and friends. At the start of the course, I note all major assignments and their submission dates. During the quarter, I have managed deadlines through being alert about submission dates. This mental map prepares me for possible clashes with my community efforts and events. In doing this, time management seems the key and I also use electronic calendars and alerts. I seek help and support from my instructor and other students when I have conflicting schedules. I have been fortunate so far to get very understanding and supportive instructors who have encouraged me and read my long explanatory emails! I keep my instructors aware of my work outside the class and communicate with them on possible schedule issues that may arise as soon as I am aware of them.*

-Deepa Yuvaraj