

STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY WIN BIG

with Sam Houston State's ACE program

BY HANNAH ZEDAKER
SPECIAL TO THE ITEM

The Sam Houston State Center for Academic Community Engagement, or ACE, provides courses in which students gain hands-on experience by working with groups and members of the Huntsville community.

The ACE initiative at SHSU involves teaching methods and coursework which allows students to transfer things learned in the classroom and apply it to everyday life while giving back to the community.

Education professor Joyce McCauley is the director of the ACE center.

"In 2004, I was the chair of the American Democracy Project Committee under provost, Dr. David Payne," McCauley said. "He's actually the one who is responsible for inspiring this movement toward more engagement with the community — encouraging students to become more active and productive citizens.

"It was through his support and encouragement that this group of faculty began working toward a more formal institutional structure. This resulted in



toward a more formal institutional structure. This resulted in the eventual establishment by Provost Hebert of the Center for Academic Community Engagement."

ACE was established in 2008 through the work of a group of professors in the Engaged Scholars Committee who believed that community engagement between SHSU students and staff could become a powerful force aiding the community of Huntsville.

SHSU is one of 311 institutions of higher learning which have been designated as Carnegie Community Engaged Campuses. SHSU now has more than 174 ACE courses represented in all six colleges at SHSU, as well as the Honors College and the First Year Experience program.

According to McCauley, like any other course at SHSU, ACE classes have requirements of



The Boys & Girls Club Choir perform an a cappella rendition of "This Land Is Your Land" at the start of "A Star's Night of Celebration" banquet for the Boys & Girls Club of Walker County on Feb. 13. Students at Sam Houston State University can work with the young people at the local Boys and Girls Club through the Academic Community Engagement, or ACE, program.

JOSHUA YATES/THE HUNTSVILLE ITEM

their own.

"ACE coursework is one initiative under the umbrella of the Center for Academic Community Engagement," McCauley said. "Professors who teach courses that could be strengthened by partnering with a community organization apply for the ACE designation. There are requirements for ACE courses such as definite connection with a course learning objectives, collaboration with a community organization to meet a need, student reflection on the ACE experience, and a minimum number of community engagement hours."

McCauley said professors of ACE courses have a lot to bene-

fit from overseeing community-involved classes.

"Teaching is much more fulfilling when course content is related to real world situations," McCauley said. "Discussions are powerful and energy is high. However, the con of teaching an ACE course is that it takes more preparation, time and risk-taking on the part of the professor."

However, professors are not the only ones who benefit from ACE classes.

"From the research we know that Academic Community Engagement enhances academic performance and has a positive effect on GPA, writing skills and critical thinking skills," McCauley said. "In addition,

students who are engaged in the community make community contacts and gain work experience, all of which builds their resume and increases their chances of being hired."

Through the ACE initiative, an estimated 500,000 hours and \$8 million dollars have been contributed by SHSU to community service, according to the ACE center.

Last fall specifically, students have taken part in a wide variety of community service.

"Students have had a vast array of experiences this semester," McCauley said. "They have tutored children in public schools, assisted teachers, written business plans, written grants

for non-profits, assisted with local events, initiated public awareness events on topics from victimization to gun safety, worked with children with disabilities, assisted adults with disabilities, refurbished houses, created marketing plans, and worked in local medical clinics."

If students would like to participate in ACE courses, they are specifically identified as ACE courses in the class schedule—just as Writing Intensive or Honors courses are.

In addition, students wanted to volunteer in the community can contact the SHSU Office for Leadership and Service for a complete list of organizations that can use volunteers.

GROWING

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needs for online degree programs and courses," said associate vice president for distance learning Bill Angrove.

"The number of degrees available online has been steadily increasing over the past four years," Angrove said. "At present, the university offers 25

degree programs completely online. They include three undergraduate degrees, 22 master's degrees, one doctoral degree and almost two dozen graduate and professional certificates."

In addition to providing high-quality, convenient and affordable online courses to students in Texas, SHSU is increasing its presence nationwide as a recognized name in

online education. This fall the total number of fully online students reached 2,303, with students spread across 38 states.

"Students are choosing SHSU online programs and courses for a number of good reasons," Angrove said. "Our online courses are taught by outstanding full-time faculty members committed to excellence in teaching and their commitment is complemented by

interactive courses designed with a high quality look and feel that is consistent throughout a degree program.

"SHSU Online provides outstanding technical support to students and faculty which improves the online educational experience," he said. "The combination of outstanding faculty, intellectual rigor, quality course design, and exceptional technology support

makes SHSU's online courses an outstanding value for undergraduate and graduate students alike."

SHSU Online's focus on quality and value in online education has not gone unnoticed. Once again this year, as in years past, the university achieved high results in US News & World Report's rankings of online education programs. In addition,

AffordableCollegesOnline.org ranked SHSU the most affordable online university in Texas, and the fourth most affordable in the nation in its "Most Affordable Online Colleges" report.

SHSU also ranks in the top 25 in the Guide to Online Schools' 2013 Online College Rankings. In addition, the university has been honored, for the second year in a row, as a "Military Friendly School," a recognition of its status among the top 20 percent of colleges, universities, and trade schools that are doing the most to help U.S. military service members, their spouses

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