

# Taking the

## A new approach to leadership development for a new century.

**By Sharon Penny**

It's not a new idea. San Diego State has been in the business of educating leaders since its founding in 1897. Sports heroes and astronauts, business founders and military brass, fire chiefs and film producers, teachers of the year and university presidents, county supervisors and federal commissioners. SDSU can claim leaders of every stripe among its many alumni.

The basics of leadership haven't changed over the last century, or the last millennium for that matter. Traditional qualities like vision, intelligence and the abilities to motivate and reconcile disparate groups remain essential.

But every era brings its own unique challenges. Today's high-tech, interactive and global society presents leaders with new challenges requiring new approaches. To meet these demands, San Diego State University has set out to become a premier institution for 21st century leadership development.

Although hundreds of universities offer individual courses on leadership, only a handful, including Cornell, Duke, Northwestern and now, SDSU, offer interdisciplinary programs specifically designed to nurture leaders.

### **A tradition of leading**

The Aztec tradition of grooming leaders is well grounded in programs such

as Associated Students—an independent student-directed corporation—as well as SDSU Ambassadors, Resident Advisors and Academic Mentors, which reside in the Division of Student Affairs.

SDSU's new leadership initiative, a partnership between Student Affairs and the College of Education, integrates academic and student life components with the goal of producing leaders capable of making a difference not only in their professions but also in their communities.

"Leadership initiatives exist in every college on the SDSU campus," said Timothy Quinnan, associate vice president for Student Affairs, Campus







Life. "Absent was a comprehensive, interdisciplinary and intentional program to develop students as leaders. We will be working with the colleges to link academic experience to leadership opportunities."

Two key components of the Center for Leadership launched last fall, a minor in leadership development and an Emerging Leaders residential learning community for freshmen.

John Pedlowe elected to live in the Emergency Leaders community, surrounded by like-minded students.

"I've learned from them and from my instructors that there are many ways to lead; you may have to

change your style to reach everyone," he said.

Quinnan is also hoping to reach out to students who may never have considered themselves leaders. He wants to expand community service opportunities, increase scholarships for student leaders, bring renowned speakers to campus and organize conferences on leadership.

Fundraising for the Center for Leadership is now underway. Housed as a stand-alone department in Modern Space—the new student union set to replace Aztec Center—the Center for Leadership will work with existing student organizations to build a strong leadership vision across campus.

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# Grooming students to excel

## Leadership with honors

Leadership is also a central theme within San Diego State's University Honors Program, which emphasizes citizenship and global responsibility, as well as intellectual achievement.

An increasingly popular option among students, the program enrolls 600 students and last year attracted more than 1,500 applicants. Among those accepted, the average GPA was 4.016.

Students say the leadership development opportunities are a big part of its appeal.

"The honors program stirred my interest in student leadership," said Corinne Pogemiller, a kinesiology major who has been accepted for graduate study at Yale University.

"From day one, you are part of something. You have friends in different majors who challenge you and whose interests are different from yours. All the way through the program, you are exposed to leadership opportunities."

Community service and cultural events included in the curriculum provide engagement in a small college environment within a large research university, while also nurturing a commitment to civic responsibility, diversity and equity.

Immersed in an interdisciplinary curriculum, the students tackle real world problems. The study abroad requirement teaches students to be global citizens, to serve and to instigate change.

"When students graduate our program," said director Stacey Sinclair said, "they are transformed."

Finance major Kaycee Gerhart, for example, says her Honors Program experience inspired her successful application to Teach for America, a nonprofit that hires "outstanding recent college graduates" for two-year posts in under-resourced schools. Gerhart will teach high school math.

## Appreciation for diversity

San Diego State's remarkable ethnic and cultural diversity, evident among students, faculty and staff alike, sends graduates and young leaders like

Kaycee Gerhart into the workforce with strong appreciation for the benefits of diversity and the necessity of social justice—two more key qualities necessary for successful leadership in the 21st century.

**"The Honors Program stirred my interest in student leadership."**

SDSU is committed to helping students develop these essential cultural competencies both inside and outside of the classroom. In fact, with the mandates of 21st leadership firmly in mind, momentum is growing campus-wide to officially integrate diversity awareness across the curriculum.

"We are grooming our students to be competitive professionals, prepared to excel as leaders in a highly diverse and globalized workforce," said Aaron Bruce, SDSU's director of diversity. "Increasing the level of student cross-cultural dialogue, civic engagement and leadership development are goals supported by our entire institution."

