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Margin of Excellence

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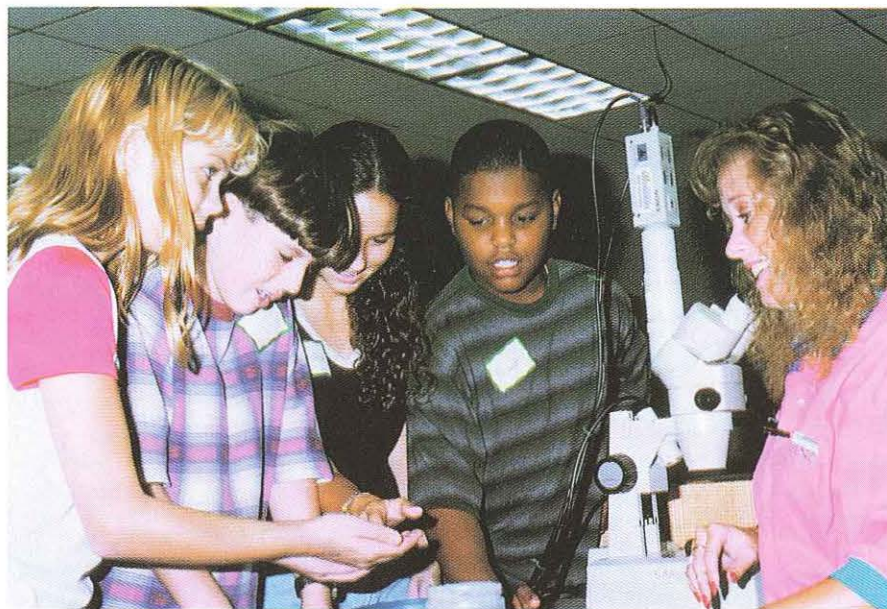
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The margin of excellence

Public dollars buy the basics. Private dollars build programs of distinction. Here are examples of two programs supported by private gifts. Future issues of USF Magazine will feature other programs supported by private funding.



"Project Oceanography" classroom at the Poynter Library. Class is broadcast via satellite.

A FISH STORY

Marine geologist Sarah Tebbens is having her personal 15 minutes of fame. She's the star of this segment of Project Oceanography—a class in the marine sciences that's broadcast via satellite from USF's St. Petersburg Marine Science Institute (MSI). This week's topic is plate tectonics—not a subject normally thrilling to fifth graders—but the studio audience of 12 girls, nine boys and two very proud teachers is rapt. Not a wiggle or a giggle in the house.

"It's incredible, isn't it?," says Teresa Greely, the program's director. "The kids are always this way. Teachers who call in all say 'My kids have never been so quiet'. We know that fish fascinate them, but plate tectonics? Even the camera crew said 'Eeew, boring', but you can see how into it they are."

Tebbens, meanwhile, is inflicting a mock earthquake on a toy family of Fisher-Price people set up on her desk. "When you get to a magnitude 5.5 earthquake, it's big enough to knock

you down," she explains, toppling the tiny figures. The camera, jiggling to simulate the turbulence, zeroes in on the little scene as Tebbens escalates the degree of destruction. To her left is a pile of Hershey's Kisses—later to be consumed by the audience—representing the units of energy released as the earth moves. The pile grows as the quakes move up the Richter scale. "To represent the energy released by a 5.5," Tebbens explains, "you'd have to fill a whole skyscraper with kisses."

During the 1996-97 school year, Project Oceanography will broadcast 28 classes to 60 sites all over the country. Segments will cover fish biology, marine geology, ecology and more. "The idea behind the project was to expose as many kids as possible to the different sciences of oceanography," says Greely. Pinellas County puts the program on its own cable chan-

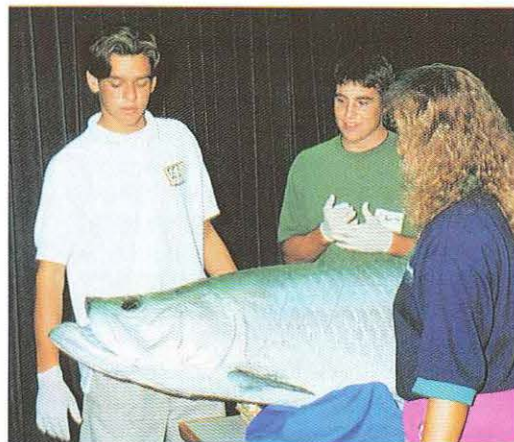
nel (Channel 14) and Hillsborough uses the Florida Broadcast Network. As news of Project Oceanography travels by word of mouth throughout the country, it is popping up in school systems as far away as Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Project Oceanography, now in its second year, is actually an outgrowth of one of the Marine Science Institute's most successful outreach efforts: The Oceanography Camp for Girls. Conceived seven years ago to encourage young women to pursue careers in the sciences, the camp has now hosted nearly 200 girls. It has achieved both international recognition and status as a model project of the National Science Foundation. Two three-week sessions for 30 girls each take place each summer, along with a camp for science teachers. Students take part in research projects, field trips and learning cruises aboard research vessels. Their teachers, all female graduate students and faculty of the MSI, are an essential part of the camp's formula.

Exposure to female role models who are science professionals, says Gail Folger of the U.S. Geological Survey, is essential. "The Camp," she says, "is the first project that targets 14 and 15-year-olds, entering high school freshmen. That's the perfect age: the girls are impressionable, enthusiastic and curious."

The U.S. Geological Survey is one of the many contributors to the camp. Gordon Campbell, CEO of donor Mercantile Bank, is another. Eleanor Naylor Dana Trust, a New York foundation also contributes generously to the camp. Dr. Robert Good, a renowned USF medical researcher, is on its board of trustees. "We especially liked," says Good, "that it includes all types of girls—gifted and not, underprivileged and well-off... The program is very sound, scientific and scholarly, but it's also clearly a lot of fun! We're proud to be a part of it."

In 1996, for the first time, the camp became a sleep-over experience. The girls spent their



nights at Eckerd College and were bused to the USF campus each morning. On one special night, though, they took their sleeping bags to the St. Petersburg Pier Aquarium and slept with the fishes. "We did our first sleepover this summer," says CEO Cathryn King, "and it was a real success. The campers learned how aquarists maintain the tanks, helped take water quality samples, checked for nitrites, take temperature checks. Besides the usual pillow fights, of course. They really enjoyed it."

But most important of all, says Dr. Coble, the Oceanography Camp experience is one that stays with the girls after they leave. "We've only just started collecting data," says Coble, "but of the first surveys, two girls said they'd be choosing engineering majors."

FAIR PLAY

When 9-year-olds vandalize their schools, do verbal swats and suspensions really make things right? When sports "heroes" behave like boors, do fines and ghost-written apologies solve the problem? And when out-of-work loggers and endangered species advocates square off over a piece of land, whose family is more important? The business of ethics is to examine *how* we decide.

USF's Ethics Center, located on the St. Petersburg campus and directed by Peter French, exists to promote the study and practice of ethics. In the two years since its creation, the size and scope of the center's programs have virtually exploded. The small building, a warren of tiny offices at 100 - 5th Ave. South, is bursting at the seams. "At our last evening lecture, we fit 135 people into that room over there," French says, pointing to a small conference room, "and we had to turn another 40 away. Let's just say, if you had to get to the restroom, you were in real trouble..."

For French, this community response is one source of satisfaction in a difficult job that requires wearing many hats. "We are the all-university Ethics Center," he explains, "so we serve and draw talent from all the campuses. But we're a Type IV center, which means that we get no state or budgeted funds. We've done all this strictly through the generosity of donors."

The USF Ethics Center has a unique, three-pronged mandate: ethics scholarship and research, ethics education, and community outreach and programming. "There are other centers, like the one at Harvard," says French, "but they concentrate strictly on scholarship and research."

USF's center now has more than 10 programs—many created in response to specific requests

from local institutions—that address applied, "hands-on" ethical issues. Among these is Commitment to Character (or C2C), a collaboration with Pinellas County Schools. It was established on a \$2,000 gift from Republic Bank, and the donated efforts of 25 teachers. Its director is Pat Fagan.

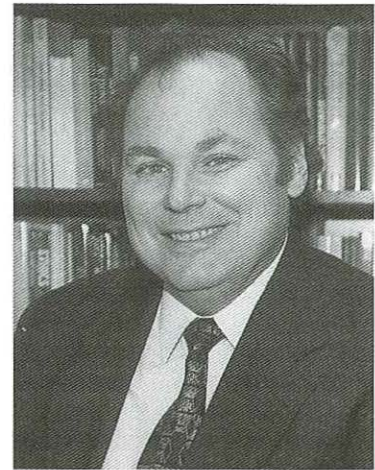
"We were first approached by Gus Stavros and School Superintendent Howard Hinesley, to work on improving student ethics in our schools," Fagan says. "We polled the community to find what their definition of a model student would be... But we knew this had to be a bottom-up effort, not another 'special subject' that teachers had to teach separately. We didn't want to say to students 'here's ethics over here, and *there's* the rest of your life over there.' Ethical behavior is integral to all of it. So, we've used the existing curriculum and identified 'teachable moments' in reading books, history, science and so on. Teachers can use these examples to get kids to think, to ask themselves the right questions, to gain a vocabulary for ethics..." Fagan reports that early feedback from classrooms shows positive results already.

Clearly, ethical behavior by young people—or the lack of it—is high on the country's moral agenda: C2C gained immediate national recognition. It was reported in newspapers from *The Boston Globe* to *The Houston Chronicle* and, says French, "the phones have rung steadily ever since with inquiries from other school systems. This is plainly something that was badly needed but never available before." C2C is now a pilot program in seven Pinellas County Schools.

While schools struggle to produce ethical students, medical professionals—from doctors to researchers—grapple with what seems to be a new moral dilemma every week. "Hospitals are now required to have ethics committees, which is great," says French. "But there were no training programs in place for those people... So, Non Profit Hospitals' Venture (NPV), a group of local hospitals, came to us to develop a model medical ethics program they could use. The issues range all the way from no-resuscitation calls on terminal patients to the ethics of restraining elderly people in nursing homes. It's a very complex field."

With a start-up grant from NPV, the center created a program that includes a trained medical ethicist to serve on hospital committees, a Graduate Medical Ethics Certification Program beginning this month, a relevant library and a regular newsletter. "We have a terrific person, Dr. Peggy DesAutels, to head this up," says French.

From one initial endowed chair—the Poynter-Jamison Chair in Media Ethics and Press



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Policy—the center's mandate has grown exponentially. The 1996 Vice Presidential debates provided a perfect stage for several symposia and classes in ethics in government and public policy. And sports—always fertile ground for moral disasters—has become part of the center's curriculum as well. A National Sports Ethics Conference, scheduled for this November, is something that is long overdue. Participants will take on all sports and all ages—from Pee-Wee League parents to unscrupulous pros.

Meanwhile, the regular Wednesday lecture series draws an ever-larger and more devoted group. "I think, for some of those folks," chuckles French, "we've become their new church." The current topic of study: "French's Four-Letter Words"—Duty, Loss, Time, Soul, Evil and Love. In addition to the evening presentations, there is a weekly luncheon series that has covered such diverse topics as physician-assisted suicide, the death penalty, the significance of wilderness, comic virtues, sports ethics, rebellion and obedience.

"This center is unique. It serves community needs that are growing each day."

Stories by Jacque Bishop