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Citizen Scholars

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Citizen Scholars

At USF St. Petersburg, scholars connect curricula to the community

LEADERSHIP, ETHICS AND CONCERN for community are all hallmarks of citizen-scholarship at USF St. Petersburg. It's found in the classrooms and professors have woven it into the campus culture.

Assistant Professor Judithanne Scourfield McLaughlan heads the Center for Civic Engagement. Her inventory of campus-wide course offerings reveals more than 500 classes since 2003 have offered students immersive study, binding campus curricula to community partners.

In real terms, that's nearly 7,000 student scholars in the community. These connections benefit majors in all types of study from accounting to criminology, journalism to education.

This academic service is different from community service. It is contained in the academic course content. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching defines it as curricular engagement, that which is governed by the class syllabus. This engagement is an institutional priority and advisers plan that every student will enroll in at least one experiential course during their college years.

This summer, spring graduate Chris Wagar began his dream job as a television reporter with NBC affiliate KHQ in Spokane, Washington.

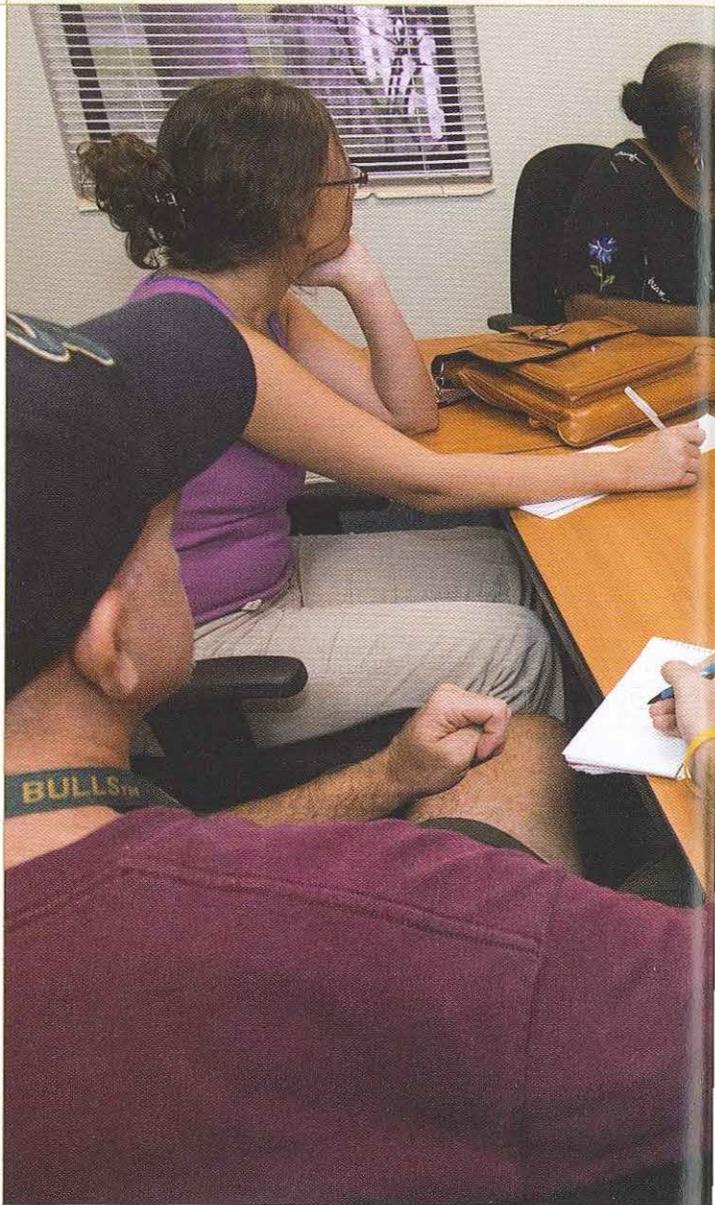
Wagar credits professors in the USF St. Petersburg Journalism and Media Studies department for advancing his professional skills. Embedded in the Midtown neighborhood in the Neighborhood News Bureau—one of two student-run community journalism programs in the country—Wagar profiled local South St. Petersburg personalities. As he honed his journalistic skills, his features were published on BayNews 9's

Web site and in *The Weekly Challenger*.

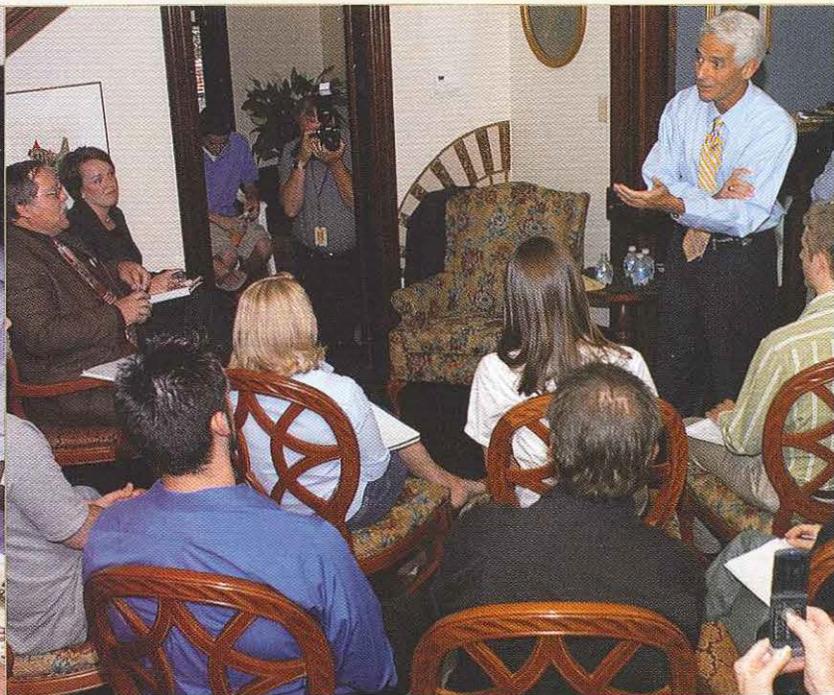
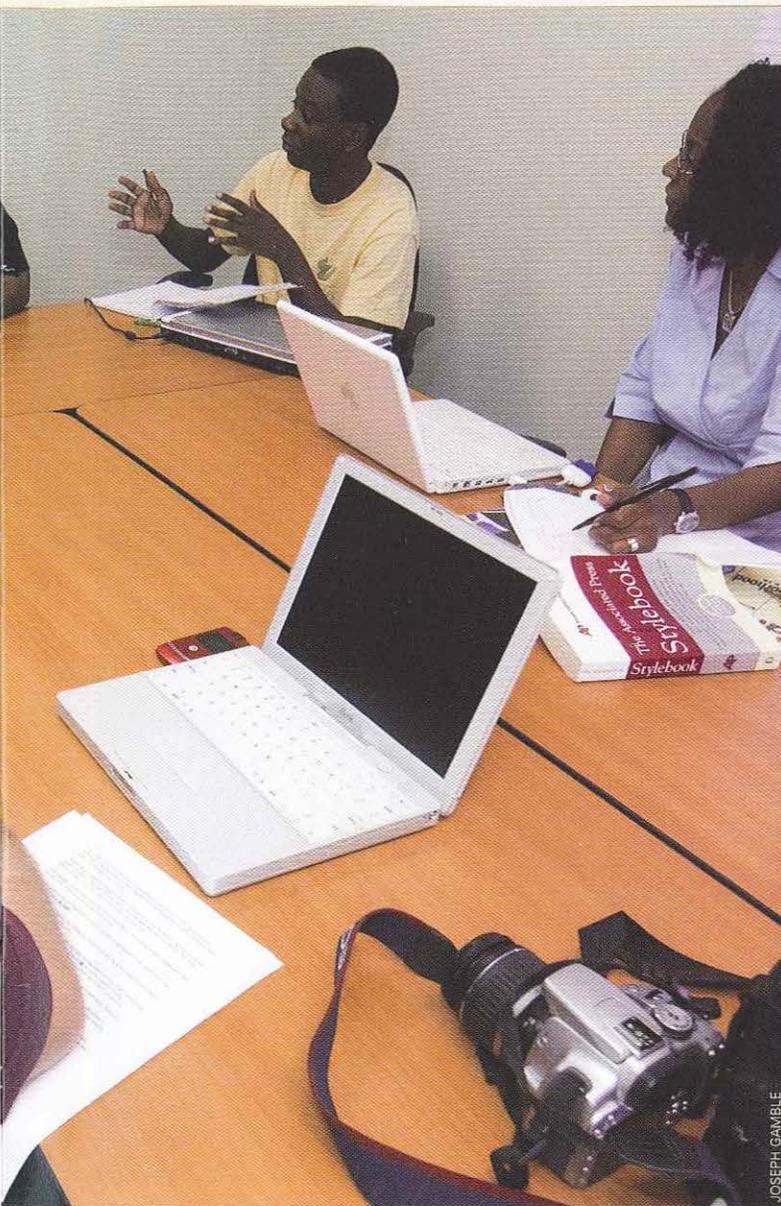
"You can take all the reporting classes you want. But when you have to go out and find true stories in a neighborhood where everyone is different from you...you have to have credibility that you can tell their story," Wagar says.

Taking advantage of connections his professors have with local news media, Wagar interned with veteran NewsChannel 8 Investigative Reporter Mark Douglas who mentored him in advanced interviewing techniques, Sunshine Law and other tricks of the trade.

Wagar produced and aired his own news package, an unusual achievement for an intern. Even now, he raves about his insider experiences, "Life is luck and who



county anglers also spoke of their annoyance with... make that kind of decision," stated Billy Peoples, a



Left, USF St. Petersburg students receive real-world experience interviewing a local community leader via the Neighborhood News Bureau, founded by journalism faculty. Above, Governor Charlie Crist, who maintains an office at USF St. Petersburg, meets with students in Professor Darryl Paulson's class. Students receive an insider's view of the election process from courses like "Road to the White House" and "Practical Politics."

JOSEPH GAMBLE

you know. I wanted to taste every aspect of journalism and my education let me."

Criminology Professor Bill Rueffle challenges his students each semester to discern local crime patterns. Students analyze stacks of police reports to plot and predict crime hot spots.

Most recently during spring semester, his class analyzed the geographic and temporal distribution of city-wide auto thefts. Students discovered a summer peak in incidents and noted locations of greater activity, then met with detectives from the St. Petersburg Police Department to review their research.

A hint to the wise—don't park outside of Tyrone Square Mall during July.

Criminology students have mapped patterns of robbery and crime activity at budget motels in St. Petersburg. Several students, including Elizabeth Slaven and Kristen Splendore, have taken advantage of job opportunities with partners such as the St. Petersburg Police Department and Pinellas County Sheriff's Office to earn internships.

"The objective of the citizen scholar model is to combine academic instruction with implementation of concepts learned in the classroom into the local community," McLauchlan says. "Our goal is to ensure that within five years, every student will have the opportunity to take at least one course with a civic engagement component within his or her major."

— Holly Kickliter