



Professor Richard Bay works with children at a local elementary school.

Scholar-Citizens use scholarship in the community

By Mike Roche Photos by Lora Gordon

At Radford University, public service is paramount. But, then again, so is academic inquiry. So which comes first: civic engagement or academic/theoretical learning?

The answer for the Scholar-Citizen Initiative, one of five premier High Impact Practices programs that the university offers — and one that has grown one thousand percent since its implementation in fall 2012 — lies in its name.

First called “Citizen-Scholar,” the program was soon renamed the “Scholar-Citizen Initiative” — or SCI — to better align its focus with the university’s emphasis on academic scholarship and student research. Not to mention, the new acronym — which, by the way, is

pronounced like the blue and sometimes cloudy thing above us — sounded more like something the students might be inclined to “reach” for.

According to program director Erin Webster Garrett, who is also a professor in the department of English, “About halfway through the process [of developing the implementation plan for SCI], we realized that, for us, what was really important was that intellectual knowledge be at the front end — because to be a good citizen, you have to be a good critical thinker.”

Naturally, then, reflection is a vital component of the learning process in SCI, and the program, Webster-Garrett says, provides students with a framework in which to make connections and



Lekia Thorpe, Art Education major, making crafts with children.



Amanda Sierra, Art Education major, making crafts and talking with children.

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Professor Richard Bay

integrate knowledge they've gained across a variety of disciplines.

Taylor Brock '16, who will graduate with distinction as a Scholar-Citizen Fellow in December, is one of the many students who can attest to the program's strong framework for facilitating cross-curricular learning.

“Being involved in the SCI program ... has helped me make connections between what I am learning in one class to what I am learning in others, and between what I'm doing as a student to the experiences I have in other parts of my life,” she said.

“In my [SCI-designated] Peace Studies class, we discussed colonization and the conditioning that takes place in a society in order to take over an already-established society ... In my British Literary History class, we read Orwell's “Shooting an Elephant” [an essay about British colonization]. My Peace Studies introduction to the issues deepened my understanding of the literature and thus my engagement with the texts in my Brit Lit class. And my Scholar-Citizen ePortfolio is helping me see how these two classes relate to one another.”

This is a vital part of high-impact learning, Webster-Garrett says, and its effectiveness is on full display in Professor Richard Bay's art education classes, which have been a part of SCI since its inception.

This past spring, Bay's art education students made weekly visits to McHarg Elementary School to work with youngsters who range from preschool to second grade. In addition to fostering self-esteem, social skills, problem-solving

and collaboration abilities, the art education students' teaching plans were strategically engineered to develop the youngsters' gross and fine motor skills — but only after rigorous pedagogical and theoretical training in the classrooms of Radford University.

Bay says his SCI-designated art education program, much like SCI itself, has grown significantly from year to year, and it's not difficult to understand why.

“Learning is about enjoyment, noise, conversation, interaction!” he said — and, incidentally, community involvement is a vital part of SCI.

According to Michael Brown, principal of McHarg Elementary School, part of the success of Bay's SCI-designated art education program is attributable to the diversity of personalities — and teaching methods — the student teachers bring to the art table.

“They [the youngsters] aren't just working with one teacher; they're working with multiple teachers—future teachers,” he said, acknowledging that just as no two students learn the same, no two teachers teach the same.

In addition to filling a critical need as an extracurricular at the school, Bay and his student teachers also play a part in beautifying the school's corridors alongside the McHarg Elementary youngsters.

Walking down the main hallway, past the handcrafted construction-paper flowers hanging in the brightly-painted cardboard window boxes (also handcrafted), one can't help noticing how well-positioned the flowers are to get sun — and, of course, SCI. ■

