**Students receive Excellence in Public Writing award from the Community Action Project**

This semester (Fall 2020), Dr. Sylvia Jalil-Gutierrez's Introduction to Cultural Anthropology class, ANTH 170 participated in the Community Action Project, developed and directed by Professor of Anthropology, Dr. Robert Borofsky of Hawaii Pacific University and editor of the California Series in Public Anthropology. Dr. Borofsky met with the anthropology department faculty to explain the project and the process involved in becoming a participant. The faculty and Dr. Borofsky met virtually for an hour to get a better understanding of what would be involved.

According to the Public Anthropology website,

“...the Project involves more than 30 schools/year from across North America. The Project reinforces key skills students need for meaningful lives and careers – critical thinking, effective communication, and active citizenship. It draws students toward (a) thoughtful analyses of a heated scientific/political debate, (2) more effective writing skills, (3) positive ways to engage others who disagree with them, and (4) how, even with heated differences separating them, students can find common ground with others to collectively address problems” [http://www.publicanthropology.org/CAW/a-FAQs.htm](http://www.publicanthropology.org/CAW/a-FAQs.htm).

“Students anonymously evaluate four letters from other students without knowing who wrote them or which schools they are from. Students evaluate these letters on four criteria and, for each criterion for each paper, provide a one to two sentence explanation justifying their assessment. During the evaluative process, students are drawn into reflecting not only on the perspectives presented in other students’ letters, but also on how they themselves might improve on their writing” (IBID).

Dr. Jalil-Gutierrez explained why the project attracted her:

“I decided to have my students participate because the writing and critical thinking skills developed through the project would serve the students well no matter what their future holds for them. In addition, I liked that student letters would be evaluated anonymously by other students and that they would have to evaluate student letters and explain why they evaluated those letters the way they did. I was not involved in the grading; the grading for this project was based on letter writing and student evaluation, which was also attractive to me”.

The focus this semester was climate change. Twenty-four students completed all the requirements of the project (letter writing and student evaluations) and four others completed the writing portion of the project, but not the student evaluations.

Criteria for evaluating the letters, based on a short video on the web site, included:

- Are their points are clearly expressed?
- How effective are their arguments and what evidence do they include to support their arguments?
- How well does the letter engage the reader at the beginning and how organized is it?
- Is the letter accessible to the non-academic reader? Are there any grammatical or spelling errors? Is the letter clearly written? ([www.publicanthropology.net](http://www.publicanthropology.net))

The project took about 2 to 2.5 weeks to complete.

Dr. Jalil-Gutierrez would like to acknowledge the students who received the Excellence in Public Writing award from the Community Action Project: Katherine Bates (International Studies), Amanda Burns (Criminology), Annaly Khanthaphixay (Pre-Management), and Lana Rayal (Biology).

Dr. Evelyn Phillips, chair of the department expresses gratitude that Dr. Sylvia Jalil-Gutierrez, a part-time professor initiated this project with Dr. Borofsky. The success of this project shows both Dr. Jalil-Gutierrez’s passion and that our students are competitive. Congratulations to all.