A Word From the Campus President

What is it that makes an economic recovery? While there are many signs read by economists and pundits that can foretell the end of a downturn — retail sales, orders for durable goods, the mood of the investor class, and the like — the true health of the economy is measured in jobs. And by that metric, the recovery has yet to begin.

Many Americans — too many — are still out of work. And the reality is that even when the recovery begins — when the economy starts adding jobs rather than losing them — many of the jobs that once formed the backbone of the American working class won’t be there anymore. For the most part, middle-class Americans no longer work in factories, or in lumber mills, or in steel mills. For decades now, we have been transitioning away from a manufacturing-based economy to a “post-industrial,” service-based economy.

So those determined and motivated citizens who are currently unable to find gainful employment face a dilemma. Where do you obtain the marketable skills necessary to hop on the recovery bandwagon once jobs start to become more available? How do you train to participate in the forthcoming energy and transportation infrastructure projects envisioned by the Obama administration? How do you prepare to enter a career in a cutting-edge and in-demand field?

The answer to all these questions is the same — community college, of course.

In one respect, this answer is no surprise. Higher education has always been the path to gainful employment, upward economic mobility, and professional satisfaction. And community colleges have long been the most affordable and accessible means of entry into the world of higher education.

But viewed through the prism of today’s economic difficulties, community college is even more of a positive resource than it historically has been. People who are out of work often don’t have the luxury of taking a longer-term approach to education. People need jobs sooner rather than later, and in many cases community college is exactly the right solution.

And you don’t have to take my word for it. President Obama recently proposed $12 billion in new spending to help prepare the nation’s workforce for cutting-edge and in-demand occupations.

Take the health care industry, for example. According to the State of Oregon, health services is one of the fastest-growing fields in the Portland area. At Portland Community College’s
Cascade Campus, where I am campus president, students can earn a certificate in Medical Assisting in as little as 12 months.

The construction industry is another good example. The State of Oregon also rates construction among the fastest-growing industries in the Portland area. Through Cascade Campus’ Skill Center and Evening Trades Apprenticeship Preparation (ETAP) programs – both of which are extremely low-cost options – students can prepare for a skilled construction job in as few as 11 weeks. Both programs qualify their graduates for immediate application for state-certified trade apprenticeships, and the Campus also offers students the opportunity to further specialize their skills through the Trades and Industry program.

Of course, these are but two of the many options available at Cascade Campus and other community college campuses around the region. In many cases, students can fully prepare for entry into a gainful occupation in two years of study or less. And as has always been the case, you can elect to transfer to a four-year college or university if you have your sight set even higher on the educational ladder. The best way to learn more about your options is to visit your local community college campus and make an appointment with an academic advisor. At the same time, visit a financial aid counselor to find out how to make it work.

So there’s no reason to despair if you happen to find yourself out of work, and there’s no reason to feel that you have no control over your situation or your future. You can take control, you can plan for the future, you can put yourself in a position where employers are competing over your skills. This economic downturn might be the most severe in recent memory, but it too will pass.

The question is – will you be ready when it does?

Algie C. Gatewood, Ed.D., is president of Portland Community College’s Cascade Campus.

On September 9, 2009, Cascade Campus – along with all other PCC campuses, centers, and facilities – officially became a tobacco-free zone.

What does this mean? Well, it’s pretty straightforward. The use, distribution, or sale of tobacco is prohibited on any PCC premises. In short, you can’t smoke (or chew) while you’re at Cascade Campus, even in the parking lot.

“The PCC tobacco-free policy is not about taking the right to smoke away from some; it’s about ensuring access to education for all,” said Marissa Johnson, PCC’s Tobacco-Free Project Coordinator. “Those who, like my husband, suffer from asthma, many who have severe allergies, and others with health concerns are unable to enter classrooms everyday because of secondhand smoke.

“This policy helps ensure that all PCC students can safely enter campus,” Johnson continued. “Much as wheelchair access and automatic doors allow students with disabilities to enter our buildings, PCC’s tobacco-free policy will enable us to serve everyone in our community.”

If you’re trying to quit, it’s still OK to use nicotine-replacement products like gum or patches while you’re on PCC property. In fact, the organizers of the effort want to help you to quit. For benefited PCC employees, there are tobacco cessation programs available through the Employee Assistance Program, Kaiser Permanente, and ODS. At the Tobacco Quit Line – 1-800-QUIT-NOW – licensed counselors are standing by from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day ready to answer your call, at no cost to you. The Tobacco Quit Line is a free resource for determining the best path toward living a tobacco-free life.

“Research indicates that many tobacco users want to quit,” said Johnson. “We understand that quitting is difficult, to say the least, so that’s why we are coming together to identify ways we can support those who need it during this transition.”

According to Johnson, a cessation committee has been formed to identify additional resources and opportunities to support those who wish to quit tobacco use. All this and much more will be available on PCC’s new tobacco free Web site, www.pcc.edu/tobaccofree. The site is in its final stages of development and will be available soon.

“I used tobacco for 10 years and I know how difficult it is to quit,” Johnson said. “I wish I would have had access to resources like these while I was making the shift to a tobacco-free lifestyle.”

For more information, cessation resources, and more visit www.pcc.edu/tobaccofree.
The great Indian spiritual and political leader Mohandas Gandhi was a firm believer in constant activity. “Indolence,” he once said, “is delightful but distressing state; we must be doing something to be happy.”

It’s a lesson that one of Gandhi’s longtime admirers, political science instructor Dr. Michael Sonnleitner, has taken to heart. This November, Sonnleitner embarks on his third extended trip to India, this time as a recipient of a Fulbright teaching fellowship. And in addition to the prestige that comes with being a Fulbright fellow, Sonnleitner carries another distinction – of the 25 lecturing Fulbright fellows set to depart for India this year, he is the only one to hail from a community college. He will spend about six months teaching at St. Thomas College, which is located in a rural part of India’s Kerala state.

“I needed something to do,” said Sonnleitner, laughing, when asked about his upcoming journey. “Aside from some horticultural skills from my youth, and the janitorial skills I picked up as a student, teaching is my only marketable skill!”


It’s an ambitious undertaking. As he wrote in his Fulbright project application, “My intent is to provide a ‘peacebuilding’ theme linking these courses on three overlapping levels: One, personal (very Gandhian); two, societal (with the United States as a case study); and three, global (emphasizing international economic and cultural multipolarity).”

The “multipolar” aspect of Sonnleitner’s peacebuilding theme will address the state of the world as it continues to transition from the bipolar dynamic of the Cold War to “a world with more than two power centers,” he explained. “Today, we are a multipolar world both economically and culturally, but a unipolar world militarily, with the United States as the sole military superpower.”

As one might infer, peace and nonviolence are major components of Sonnleitner’s personal and professional lives.

This was not always so, however.

See SONNLEITNER on Page 11
Going to college is a dream shared by millions of people, an intrinsic step on the way to financial security and professional satisfaction. But for many, getting started in college can present a bewildering array of obstacles as they struggle to make sense of processes like admissions, registration, placement, advising, and financial aid.

However, thanks to the S.T.A.R.T Lab – a new service at Portland Community College’s Cascade Campus – new students can take care of all of these requirements at once, and then get on with the business of obtaining an education.

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First on the Scene

Students from the Fire Protection Technology, Emergency Medical Technician, and Paramedic programs got to strut their stuff this spring at an Open House hosted by the Emergency Services Division. During a multiphase simulation, visitors were given a firsthand glimpse at how emergency personnel deal with a life-threatening situation.

A volunteer “victim” was cut free from the wreckage of a car (donated by a local towing company), given immediate emergency treatment at the scene of the accident, and then loaded into a waiting ambulance for transit to a hospital. Live narration informed onlookers about each phase of the procedure, including information about the specialized equipment and techniques used by the various personnel on the scene.

To learn more about programs in the Emergency Services Division, visit www.pcc.edu/programs/emergency-medical.
Three Cascade Campus students were honored for their outstanding math and science scholarship this summer as recipients of $1,000 scholarships from the Oregon NASA Space Grant. Pictured from left are Deborah Cochrane, Director of the Portland Teachers Program; Cascade Campus math instructor Shane Horner; scholarship winners Noah Dear and Ryan Pelkey; and Campus President Algie Gatewood. Not pictured is scholarship winner Philip Kangas.

A delegation of PCC faculty and staff made a journey to China this summer, where they discussed – in between taking in the sights and sounds – their favorite subjects: community colleges and business.

“The trip is part of an effort to internationalize our business curriculum,” said Cascade Campus Arts & Professions Dean Kate Dins, who led the group along with Cheryl Scott, Dean of the Business and Humanities division at the Rock Creek Campus. Joining them were Cascade Campus Business Administration instructors Cole Chatterton, Sam Hopf, Steve Hopf, and Ken Mitchell-Phillips; Tammy Marquez-Oldham, Interim Director of the PCC Small Business Development Center; Usha Ramanujam, Business Administration instructor at Rock Creek; and Greg Rapp and Phil Seder, both from the Business Administration program at the Sylvania Campus.

The group toured three major cities during the trip – Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Suzhou – where they paid visits to an assortment of businesses and attended lectures (all pre-approved by the government, Chatterton said) at several educational institutions, including Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Suzhou University, and Fudan University. They also visited a branch campus of Honk Kong Community College (located, ironically, in Suzhou), which is part of China’s small but growing network of community colleges.

With a heavy emphasis on success in the classroom, Dins said. Chinese community college students have virtually no time for extracurricular studies. As a relatively new facet in the educational system, Chinese community colleges are still “staking out their turf,” she said.

“Community colleges are not very big in China,” said Dins, “but they’re becoming more numerous. The traditional education system is set up in three tracks. Every-one takes a test during their senior year of high school, and is then placed into a track — upper university, lower university, or vocational school.”

Historically, the system is quite rigid, and doesn’t allow for movement between the different tracks. The growing influence and presence of community colleges, though, is providing Chinese students with a great deal more professional and social flexibility, she said.

“Traditionally, once you’ve been placed into your track, that’s it,” Dins said. “The community college concept is allowing much more social movement.”

Increased social and economic mobility are fast becoming features of China’s increasingly privatized economy, said Chatterton.
Cascade Welcomes the Community

Two North Portland neighborhood festivals converged this summer when Cascade Campus combined its annual National Night Out and Campus Open House events into one big neighborhood celebration. The event drew visitors of all ages from around the neighborhood to the Campus to enjoy food, games, prizes, live entertainment, and demonstrations from Cascade academic programs. In keeping with National Night Out’s theme, “a going-away party for crime and drugs,” a host of community organizations and government agencies, who helped sponsor the celebration, provided demonstrations and information on how to be safe at home and in the neighborhood. The event was also co-sponsored by a wide range of local businesses, who were on hand with information and special offers for visitors.

While an exact head count was impossible to determine, Burgerville – which provided the food during the day’s festivities – reported that 560 hot dogs were grilled and served up to attendees.

Poppe the Panther and DeAnne Hardy take a pause during DeAnne’s interactive Zumba dance demonstration.

Cascade Campus’ Allen Jones – second from right, on the guitar and his band, the Usual Suspects, entertain the crowd during the party.

Skill Center Director James Bowles, left, Campus President Algie Gatewood, and PCC Public Safety Lieutenant Derrick Foxworth enjoy the festivities.

Heidi Dombek ably holds down the fort at the information booth.

A soaking-wet women’s basketball Head Coach John Lee hauls himself out of the dunk tank after falling victim to a well-aimed softball.

Some local kids show off their Zumba moves.
A special traveling session of the Oregon Legislature’s Joint Ways and Means Committee – which included Larry Galizio, foreground, a former state legislator and PCC instructor -- was held this spring in the Moriarty Auditorium. Citizens from all over the region traveled to Cascade Campus to attend the hearing, the only such session held in the Portland area, where they described to lawmakers the many ways in which the economic downturn has impacted their lives. Both the auditorium and the overflow seating area in Terrell Hall 122 were filled beyond capacity.

Cascade Welcomes New Full-Time Employees

William “Bill” Benjamin joined the Emergency Services division as the Fire Protection Technology program’s first academic professional in January, 2009. Bill comes to Cascade Campus from Overland Park, Kansas, with nearly 40 years of fire fighter experience, and 29 years in community college instruction and management. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Fire Science and a master’s degree in Industrial Safety.

Nikki Barone has rejoined Cascade Campus as our new Public Safety Sergeant. After earning her bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice from San Jose State University, Nikki moved to Oregon to work on her master’s degree. Starting in 1997, she worked in the Cascade Public Safety Office, where she stayed for six years before transferring to the Sylvania Campus. She returned to Cascade in August of this year

Sandra Benfield joined the Emergency Service division from the Allied Health division. She is now a full-time Instructional Administrative Assistant.

Charma Boeschen joined the Liberal Arts & Mathematics in August as a full-time Spanish instructor. Charma was formerly a part-time instructor at the Sylvania Campus.

Shawna Brown is the new Administrative Assistant for the Trades & Industry Department, hired in December 2008. Shawna has over 20 years of customer service experience and two years of apprenticeship experience.

Michael Cruse arrived at Cascade Campus in July 2009 as the new Employment Specialist for the Evening Trades Apprenticeship Preparation program. Michael has more than 20 years of experience working as a case manager with economically and culturally diverse people in the community. Michael received his bachelor’s degree from Portland State University.

Virginia Chambers joined Cascade Campus in August as a full time instructor in the Medical Assisting program. Her most recent position was as a research coordinator in the Harold Schnitzer Diabetes Health Center at Oregon Health & Sciences University. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Sociology from Portland State University, and completed her medical assisting training at Concorde Career Institute. She is currently working toward her master’s degree in Health Care Administration.

Lutgarda Cowan had been a part-time English faculty member at Cascade Campus for several years before becoming a full-time instructor in August.

Brandon Edwards had been teaching math on a part-time basis for Cascade since 1997. He made the switch to full-time, one-year temporary status in August, and is the faculty advisor for the Cascade GO Club.

Tammy Louie had been a part-time math instructor at Cascade since 2007, and made the switch to full-time, one-year temporary status in Winter Term 2009.

Kirk Perry had been a part-time literature instructor at Cascade since 2004, and made the switch to full-time, one-year temporary status in August. He has made a name for himself – and increased the enrollment and popularity of his poetry classes – by visiting writing classes and promoting his love of verse.

Maura Warren, our new Athletic Programs Assistant, is a graduate of Washington State University, where she received her degree in Sport Management. After graduation she moved from Seattle to Beaverton, where she worked for Tualatin Hills Parks and Recreation. She is pleased to be working in college athletics once again.
The students in Monica Schneider’s Social Psychology class at Portland Community College’s Cascade Campus got a rare glimpse recently into the difference – and the relationship – between the theory they learn in the classroom and the reality of the professional world.

Schneider’s students recently spent the morning at the William Temple House in Northwest Portland, where they presented their recent research projects to Temple House staff. While they were at it, they had a chance to interact with staff and clients, get an idea of how the principles of social psychology play out in the real world – and fulfill the course’s service learning requirement.

“The study of psychology is meant to be a shared experience,” Schneider said. “This was a great opportunity for my students to take what they’ve learned outside of class, outside of the text.”

Schneider defines social psychology as “the scientific study of how individuals behave, think, and feel in social situations.” Broadly speaking, the discipline examines how individuals function when exposed to the pressures and dynamics of a group setting, and also how psychological principles and practices can be employed to improve the health of the whole community. Viewed in this respect, the William Temple House – which provides mental health, pastoral, and emergency social services for the working poor and others in need – was an ideal setting for Schneider’s class to present its research and talk shop with the house’s professional staff.

The choice of the William Temple House also satisfied Schneider’s desire to explore the connection between poverty and mental illness, as well as expose her students to an environment where community service is the guiding principle.

“I was looking for a place that serves the public,” she said, “where my students could see how they could use their knowledge to give something back to the community. It’s also important for them to have an awareness of poverty in the community, and an awareness of the link between poverty and mental illness. Times are very hard at the moment, and there are a lot of people who need help right now.”

Schneider got in touch with Lael Concordia, William Temple’s director of social services, who was enthusiastic about hosting the students.

“Monica explained to me what she wanted to do,” Concordia said, “and it sounded interesting. I wanted her students to see William Temple as a model of what trained and dedicated people can do for their fellow human beings.”

Before the students visited William Temple House, Concordia paid a visit of her own to Schneider’s class, where she spoke with them about their projects.

“The students really impressed me by being so inquisitive and intellectually engaged,” she said. “I’m a big believer in education, and I was pleased to see them so excited.”

Alyssa Munsey, an environmental science major, presented her research on “Self-Presentation and Perceptions of the Self.”

“I really like the idea of helping the community,” said Munsey, who aspires to join the Peace Corps one day. “This class has changed how I view the way people interact, and has really given me a wider view of the world.”

Maya Noble, a nursing student, echoed Munsey’s sentiments. “This class has been really exciting,” said Noble, whose research project was about persuasion and persuasive techniques. “I took it because it’s a nursing prerequisite, but it’s really made me consider working in a community health setting.”

At the end of the day, Schneider was delighted with the experience at William Temple House, and proud of the scholarship and polish of her students.

“I’m so proud of their work,” she said of her students. “They started out with curiosity and a desire to help, and they ended up doing some really good work.”

“It was a joy to see their confidence grow.”
There are times in life when a person can stand alone, when one’s individual wits, skill, training, and determination are enough to win the day. There are other times, though – most times, to be honest – when we must rely on the aid and encouragement of others in order to succeed. Sometimes, we need others to hold the door open for us before we can walk through.

For a group of young men from North Portland, the Open Doors program at Cascade Campus provides just such an opportunity.

The program, now in its second year, was designed to hold open the door to college for a segment of the population which has been traditionally underrepresented in the halls of higher education – young males of color.

“Young men of color are the most at-risk demographic in our society,” said Cascade Campus President Algie Gatewood. “They are far more likely to drop out of school or end up in jail than any other group. The Open Doors program helps provide these young men with the academic and social support they need to stay in high school and go on to college.”

And if an Open Doors student does manage to stick with the program through the end of high school, there’s a payoff: a scholarship good for up to two years’ tuition-free study at PCC.

The program is an extension of Cascade Campus’ Middle College, in which the Open Doors students also participate. The Middle College allows students from Jefferson and Roosevelt high schools to take classes at Cascade Campus while still enrolled in high school, and makes it possible by covering the cost of books, tuition, and fees. Open Doors, however, goes further and provides students with additional wraparound services to help succeed academically and socially.

Open Doors students enter the program in the summer following their freshman year in high school, when they for 10-student cohorts comprised of classmates of the same grade level. They spend the summer taking math and science courses though the Campus’ Margaret Carter Skill Center, and continue to do so once the school year begins. As they progress through high school, they will gradually transition out of the Skill Center and into the Campus’ mainstream population, where they study alongside regular PCC students.

The cohort remains together as a group throughout the remainder of the students’ time in high school, and attends class and together. Combined with the program’s other features – including tutoring and group study sessions in the Cascade Campus Learning Center – the idea is that the members of the cohort will provide positive encouragement and reinforcement to one another, increasing the chances that each student will succeed in and out of the classroom.

“Back up the program’s cohort structure is a range of additional services, including individual case management from the program coordinator, the creation of an academic plan of work for each student, and regular meetings between the student, his parents/guardians, and the program coordinator. But classes in the summertime, for teenage boys? They’ll never go for it, right?”

“It’s good,” said John Noel, 15, an Open Doors student. “If I wasn’t in the program, I’d be sleeping or just hanging out. It keeps us steady, keeps us out of trouble.”

Continued on Page 10
As a young man, Sonnleitner spent the summer of 1969 in Washington, D.C., as an intern for the famous Sen. Henry “Scoop” Jackson, a Democrat from Washington state. Among his duties, he said, was proofreading the speeches that Sen. Jackson would give as a sponsor of a proposed anti-ballistic missile system.

As the Vietnam conflict – and the popular movement against it – escalated, Sonnleitner found himself more and more alienated from the values he had held for most of his life. An admirer of Dr. King – who had been assassinated the previous year – he found it increasingly difficult to support the war.

“Sen. Jackson’s speeches came to make no logical sense to me,” Sonnleitner said.

Things came to a head when he and a group of friends were robbed at gunpoint en route to a social engagement. The incident, and his own angry reaction to it, convinced Sonnleitner that his energies would be better spent elsewhere. He committed himself to the principles of nonviolence, and enrolled in graduate school at the University of Minnesota, where the political science program is well-known for its emphasis on nonviolence and South Asian studies.

“It was time to rein in my temper,” he said of his decision. “There was a revolution of sorts going on in the United States at that time, and I decided that for me, the revolution had better be personal.”

Sonnleitner went on to earn his master’s degree and Ph.D. in political science from Minnesota, and embarked on a professional life dedicated to advancing the notion of nonviolence, and teaching and learning about the life and work of Gandhi. He made his first trip to India in 1971-72 as the recipient of a Watson Foundation Fellowship, and his second during the 1980s to attend a Gandhi studies conference.

After spending time teaching at the university level in Iowa and Illinois, Sonnleitner, who was raised in Seattle, returned to the Northwest in 1988, when he began teaching political science courses at PCC. He now splits his duties between the Cascade and Rock Creek campuses, and finds the time to teach a couple of graduate-level courses in conflict resolution at Portland State University. He’s also the founder of PCC’s Peace and Conflict Studies program, the largest such program at an American community college.

Sonnleitner said he is looking forward to the opportunity to build institutional ties between PCC and St. Thomas College, which he hopes might someday lead to further cultural exchanges between the two schools. Once he returns, he intends to use his experiences to contribute to PCC’s ongoing effort to internationalize its curricula across the academic disciplines, particularly with regard to an increased focus on India and other South Asian nations.

“I would like to see PCC enrich its curricula relating to South Asia,” he said. “We are strong on China, but India will soon have more people than China. I expect to infuse more South Asian studies content into my political science courses, and perhaps even create a new political science course focused on South Asia.”

Whatever the outcome once he returns from his trip, one thing seems certain for Sonnleitner: He will have very little time for that “delightful but distressing state” against which Gandhi warned us. But, he seems more excited than daunted by the task before him. Quoting Gandhi with a smile, he said:

“God protects those for whom God has a purpose.”
CHINA Continued from Page 6

He added, however, that the more liberalized business climate has a downside – a growing economic gap between the new capitalist ruling class and the traditionally poor working class. Cities like Hong Kong and Shanghai boast glittering, modern skylines, while many people still toil in traditional agrarian settings in the countryside, and many others labor for scant wages in the nation’s growing industrial centers. At the same time, he said, there is tension between China’s centralized, socialist economy and the emerging private sector.

“If you want to start a small business, you can’t simply go and hang out a shingle,” he said. “The government is very involved in almost every aspect of small business.”

- Cole Chatterton

“It’s very much a case of two systems, one country,” Chatterton said.

To illustrate his point, he described the island of Hong Kong, where millions of inhabitants are crammed into a relatively small area. The majority of residents live in government housing, where entire families live in apartments that measure about 350 square feet. If you’ve managed to make some money in the private sector, he said, you can buy a larger apartment – about 500 square feet – for a price starting at around $500,000.

“It’s easy to tell where a section of government housing ends and a section of private-sector housing begins,” he said, “because there’s a rainbow of colors in the government section, where everyone hangs their laundry out to dry.”

Chatterton said the PCC group was interested in learning how modern Chinese businesses operate, and particularly how small businesses in China are developing in a private economy that is still heavily regulated by the government. “If you want to start a small business, you can’t simply go and hang out a shingle,” he said. “The government is very involved in almost every aspect of small business.”

Despite the obvious tensions between old and new, public and private, rich and poor, there is a pervasive sense of optimism and pride surrounding China’s emergence onto the global economic stage, said Dins, and it behooves American businesses and educators to pay attention.

“There’s definitely an acknowledgement that China is still a developing country,” she said, “but people are proud and excited about what’s going on. It’s a dynamic, up-and-coming nation, and it’s a force in the world economy.

“I’m happy that PCC students will have the chance to learn more about it because of this trip.”
Big things, it is often said, spring from big ideas. Or, in the case of Cascade Campus student James Sibelle, from Big Underwear. Clearly, an explanation is in order.

Sibelle, a student in the Emergency Medical Technician program, is part of a group that is organizing a most unusual journey. Calling themselves the “Big Underwear Social Tour,” they plan to drive an old bus to the town of Puebla, Mexico, where they will perform an old-fashioned variety show for the locals. From Puebla, the troupe will make its way by bus south to Panama, performing at various stops along the way.

“We’re attempting to do a variety show reminiscent of the old vaudevillian style,” Sibelle explained. But that explanation only scratches the surface. According to Big Underwear’s Web site, “The Big Underwear Social Tour is an experiment in the social action and reaction of a group of international artists brought together, close together, aboard a tour bus in Mexico bound for Panama. The tour bus serves as a mode of transportation, a home, a refugee, a courtroom, a middle ground in the highs and lows of life on the road.”

Sibelle’s role in the troupe is show medic and documentarian. He plans to film the entire endeavor – on the bus and off – and produce a documentary film of the troupe’s adventures. His studies at Cascade Campus are helping to prepare him for his role as medic, and he plans to enroll in the campus’ Paramedic program after he returns to the United States.

“I feel I’m ready for whatever we might encounter on the road,” Sibelle said. “The EMT program does a great job preparing us for a whole range of situations.”

The idea behind the Big Underwear Social Tour was hatched several years ago when a couple of Sibelle’s friends – local Portland street performer Brady Bradshaw and German performer Irmtraud Speigel – were discussing how live performance can connect with onlookers in an immediate, visceral way. This conversation morphed into a talk about performance as a medium for cultural exchange, and the Big Underwear Tour was born. But why “Big Underwear”?

“It’s a metaphor,” said Sibelle, grinning. “It’s the underwear that’s under your skin. It’s the set of experiences and beliefs that shape how you view the world.”

The idea then, is for the performers on the tour to display their Big Underwear to the world – no pretensions, no assumptions, just performers and audience, each equally influencing the other. The tour will be not-for-profit, and “as self-sustaining as possible,” Sibelle said. At each performance venue, the troupe will solicit donations to help them reach the next. For the artists – and the eventual documentary film – the tour will be as much about life on the bus as it is about the performances themselves. Having conceived of their mission, Sibelle said, the troupe is now facing the daunting task of organizing a road tour of diverse performers through several countries. First on their agenda was obtaining a set of wheels – they bought a 1976 American General bus from a Seattle-based circus troupe, and are outfitting it to sleep 15 people.

When asked about the potential pitfalls of driving a 30-plus-year-old bus through Central America, Sibelle was confident. “It’s got a good transmission in it,” he said, laughing.

Another priority, of course, is finding performers. To this end, Sibelle said they are relying on Bradshaw and Speigel’s connections to recruit their members. So far, they have assembled a multitalented mix of performers from North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, and will have a full complement by the time the tour kicks off in November 2010. In the meantime, Sibelle is planning a preliminary trip to Puebla this fall to construct a stage and lay the groundwork for the rest of the tour.

At this point, Big Underwear’s biggest obstacle, Sibelle said, is startup funds. They are being supported by the Rodara Foundation, a nonprofit group, but are still in need of donations. If you’re interested in making a contribution, or just learning more about Big Underwear, you can visit their Web site at www.big-underwear-social-tour.com, or e-mail Sibelle at jamesonthebus@gmail.com.

Once the tour is over, the performers will disperse and Sibelle will get down to the business of editing and producing his film, which he plans to screen here in Portland. And if it’s a success, will he and his compatriots take their Big Underwear to another part of the world?

“We’ll see,” he replied thoughtfully. “For now, it’s one country at a time.”
New Virtual Assistant Certificate

A new certificate program at PCC helps students harness the power of the information age to allow them to pursue a wide range of employment opportunities from the comfort of their own homes. The Virtual Assistant certificate prepares students to carry out a number of traditional “office” functions – such as accounting, administrative assisting, data management, and the like – as an independent contractor from a remote location. All that’s required is a marketable set of skills and an Internet connection.

PCC is the first Pacific Northwest community college to offer a Virtual Assistant certificate, said Verna Reardon, who coordinates the program at Cascade Campus. The program is offered at the Sylvania and Rock Creek campuses in addition to Cascade.

Reardon added that the certificate program is not about adding specific office or professional skills – virtual assistants are assumed to be proficient in the services they offer – but rather about how to set oneself up as a virtual assistant.

“It’s really about helping people to harness technology so they can be entrepreneurs,” Reardon said. “Virtual assistants can be writers, editors, Web designers, accountants – pretty much anyone you would normally find in an office. The difference is that virtual assistants work for themselves, from just about anywhere.”

In addition to helping students with the basics of setting up an office and starting their own business, the Virtual Assistant certificate programs connects students with the growing network of virtual assistants around the country and around the world through organizations such as the International Virtual Assistants Association. The association helps connect virtual assistants with clients, and also serves as a reference network for customers who are seeking a specific set of skills.

Reardon added that students can earn a Virtual Assistant certificate in less than a year. What’s more, she said, virtual assistants can match their clients and work with their own skills and interests, allowing for a degree of freedom that office-bound workers often don’t have.

“It’s really a great way to earn a good living working from home,” Reardon said. “Virtual assisting gives office workers a freedom and flexibility they’ve never had before.”

To learn more about the PCC Virtual Assistant certificate program, visit www.pcc.edu/programs/computer-applications/virtual-asst/.

OPEN DOORS Continued from Page 10

The Open Doors students are spending part of the summer at the University of Portland – a partner in the program – where they take part in intensive individual and group tutoring sessions with UP education students. This is the first summer that UP and Open Doors have teamed up, and so far the collaboration has been a great success.

“The sessions at UP are great,” said Eddie Jackson, 17. “You can ask more questions than you can in class, and the tutors can take the time to really help you out. I feel like I’ll do much better in my high school classes this fall.”

Both Noel and Jackson are car buffs, and are interested in taking auto repair classes somewhere along the line, with an eye toward perhaps going into engineering. Jackson is interested in computers, and has already identified the PCC computer courses he wants to take while he’s still in high school. Noel said he wants to one day open his own business. Both of them, though, firmly understand the connection between staying in school and achieving these goals. Both added that Open Doors has made a difference in their lives, and intend to stay with the program through the end of high school and beyond.

“I’m looking forward to that two-year scholarship,” said Noel, laughing.

Former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, left, and Congressman Earl Blumenauer of Oregon take questions from the audience during a Health Care Summit held this summer in the Moriarty Auditorium. Dean and Blumenauer discussed some of the different health care reform proposals under consideration by Congress, and listened to audience members – insured and uninsured alike – describe their experiences with the American health care system.