

# Undergraduate Research Newsletter

Issue 3, June 25, 2008

## What's Happening!

- June 25, 2008**  
**12:00 noon**     **Diana Akiyama, Office for Religious & Spiritual Life**  
**Mosher One, includes lunch**
- June 26, 2008**  
**6:30 pm**     Griffith Park Observatory  
Please see ResLife  
<http://www.griffithobs.org/>
- June 27, 2008**  
**10:00 am-8:00 pm**     Pacific Asia Museum Free Day  
Pacific Asia Museum  
46 N Los Robles AVE  
Pasadena CA 91105  
<http://www.pacificasiamuseum.org>
- July 2, 2008**  
**12:00 pm**     **Eric Newhall, English & Comparative Lit. Studies**  
**Mosher One, includes lunch**

# Wednesday's Featured Speaker

## Reverend Diana Akiyama



At a liberal arts school as secular as Occidental, undertaking the overwhelming task of establishing an Office for Religious and Spiritual Life (ORSL) proved to be no easy feat for Director Diana Akiyama, who came to the College in 2003. Despite challenges posed by the College's approach to religion on campus, Reverend Akiyama and her support staff have molded a successful program which allows students to reflect upon issues of "spirituality, religion, ethics moral development, social justice, religious diversity and the pursuit of meaningful work" through a intellectual and moral lenses. The creation of the ORSL was made possible through a \$2 million Lily Endowment the College received in 2003. The program has allowed numerous Oxy students to engage and intersect their spiritual and intellectual growth, a key component of an interdisciplinary, liberal arts education. Through research, students are encouraged to explore questions of faith, religion, values and ethics within an academic context. The research aspect of the program also attempts to foster a relationship with students and their mentors on campus. The Values and Vocations Fellowships (made possible through the Angell Foundation) allow students to explore spirituality and meaningful work through public service internships. In addition to their community service projects, Fellows are expected to attend a weekly seminar and are paid so as not to exclude those students dependent on work study.

The College's "capacity to embrace the program" has at times been challenged by its secularism. Although slowly changing in recent years, students often designate a negative connotation to faith, associating it with fundamentalism, narrow-mindedness, and anti-intellectualism. While Rev. Akiyama acknowledges some truth to this perspective, she notes the

stereotype should not be generalized to the whole faith community. As Rev. Akiyama explained, "To be progressive is to be not fundamentalist; this is true; however, it is a mistake to assume that all people of faith are conservative fundamentalists." She credits the "political phenomenon" of two decades of Republican conservatism (not to mention, the last 8 years of neo-conservatism) as the impetus for many people's negative perception of people of faith. The ORSL has organized a series of events, such as one on Progressive Islam, that attempt to address these stereotypes. Furthermore, the Progressive Christians Union on campus supports and provides space for students who see themselves as progressive Christians. Undoubtedly, the ORSL has been an "asset on campus" as its principles reflect the "integrated learning approach of Occidental students."

**(Article by Vanda Ayrapetyan)**

As Revered Akiyama is leaving Occidental College, the Undergraduate Research Center would like to express its sincere gratitude for her dedication to Occidental College and the spiritual growth of its students. We will miss her dearly but wish her all the best as she embarks upon other journeys.

**THANK YOU!**



Sneak Peek!!!!

**"Role of Love, Passion, and Hope in Research"**

Rev. Akiyama's talk offers a perspective on research which invites students to consider the non-rational dimension of thinking and knowing. The Undergraduate Research Center would like to express its sincere gratitude to Reverend Diana Akiyama for her dedication to Occidental College and the spiritual growth of its students. We will miss you dearly but wish you all the best as your embark upon other journeys.

# Justice at the workplace



Psychology major, Marissa Cassman ('10), explores perceptions of justice at the workplace and its effects on counter-productive work behavior

Whether you like to admit it or not, we've all done it...chatting online with friends, testing our luck at poker, or visiting some celebrity website instead of occupying ourselves with the tasks we're paid to complete. Counter-productive work habits such as those I have described above are a daily occurrence in most (if not all) working individuals' lives, which is what sparked Psychology junior Marissa Cassman's interest in exploring how lack of justice at the workplace contributes to counter-productive work behavior. Working since the age of 14 at different jobs and entry levels, Cassman has been exposed to an array of counter-productive work behavior. Last summer when she was training as a sales associate for a national retail chain, Cassman was shocked to discover that a "huge chunk" of the training exercise focused on employee theft in the workplace. Apparently, employee theft is a serious problem for retail stores as they lose about \$5-\$50 billion in annual sales. Amazed by this "social problem" that has swept the country's retail industry, Cassman wants to investigate its causes as part of her summer research with Psychology professor, Brian Kim. An employee's tendency to engage in counter-productive work behavior depends on their perceived need for autonomy (how much one has control at the workplace) and actual autonomy provided; the greater the match between these two levels of autonomy, the less likely the employee will engage in counter-productive work behavior.

Cassman will be collecting her data through online survey responses she is asking retail workers to take (participants will be rewarded \$5). She will be utilizing existing measure to observe the degree of match between perceived levels of needed autonomy and actual autonomy received at the workplace. The psychology major's hypothesis is that the "amount of voice," or the channel of communication granted for constructive criticism, will determine the level of match. While Cassman's survey focuses on retail stores, she hopes her research findings can be interpreted and generalized to various levels of management and industries.

**(Story by Vanda Ayrapetyan)**