



University President Soraya M. Coley and ASI President Jenny Greenberg answer questions from students at Pizza with the Presidents.

# Change Maker

ASI  
PRESIDENT  
HONES  
LEADERSHIP  
SKILLS ON  
THE JOB

By Melanie Johnson

ASI President **Jenny Greenberg** aspires to be a difference maker.

The senior, who is studying sociology with an emphasis in criminology, has felt that pull since she was a little girl glued to episodes of the television series NCIS.

"I've always been interested in crime as far as I can remember," she says.

As she got older and learned more about how the justice system works, her interest in crime shows waned, but her desire to make a difference grew. Her courses and extracurricular activities at Cal Poly Pomona have helped her zero in on what she wants to do after graduation – criminal justice policy reform work.

"I am more interested in preventing crime and understanding the root causes," she says. "My experiences have taught me to view crime as more of a reflection on our governing society rather than the criminals themselves."

At a polytechnic university steeped in the philosophy of learn-by-doing, Greenberg is getting hands-on opportunities in her coursework, volunteer activities and student leadership posts that will shape her efforts to improve lives.

"It's harder to describe what a hands-on education is for social science majors," she says. "For us, hands on is mostly researching and writing. But writing to me is creating."

Greenberg applies the writing and research skills from her sociology courses to her activities outside of the classroom. She worked on a research project with faculty in her department on resources for veterans. She also provided input to a student conducting research on biases in standardized testing.

She put her passion for criminal justice to work – volunteer teaching academic orientation and introduction to college courses to inmates through Political Science Professor **Renford Reese's Prison Education Project (PEP)**.

Greenberg recalled her first visit to Norco's California Rehabilitation

Center (a prison for men) and how an arrival at the wrong gate and a security measure involving a whistle nearly cancelled her trip. Her group was set to go through the security checkpoint but got separated from the person who was carrying the whistle – a safety requirement because volunteers would be alone in the classroom with the inmates. An hour later, a new whistle was purchased and the group went through.

"When we arrived, all of the inmates were sitting there waiting for us," she says. "I was struck by how they apologized to us for the difficulty coming in. It immediately set up an atmosphere of respect between us."

Her students had lots of questions. They wanted to know what kind of jobs they could get, what resources would be available and whether they could vote, she says.

After teaching incarcerated men, women and juveniles, Greenberg says she feels a connection between her volunteer work and her student leadership role on campus.

"Working with inmates and new students is essentially the same thing," she says. "With PEP, a lot of it is helping them get resources to transition back into society. Here, a lot of what you do is helping students get resources to operate in college society."

Greenberg's involvement in student leadership began during her freshman year living in Montecito Hall where her resident advisors recruited her to serve on housing's Inter-Hall Council.

"I ended up really enjoying my time there," she says. "I liked getting to brainstorm with other students about what programs and projects they would like to see happen and follow through with producing those programs and projects."

ASI Past President Farris Hamza ('18, industrial engineering) served with Greenberg on the Inter-Hall Council and encouraged her to get involved in ASI, appointing her to secretary of internal affairs and tasking her with researching services for student health and wellbeing.

Typically, the secretary of internal affairs will later run for president, but Greenberg didn't plan to seek a higher office. Again, she was recruited.

"People were telling me, 'You are the only person with the experience for this,'" she says. "I ran uncontested."

Advocacy is also important to Greenberg. She and nine other students recently traveled to Sacramento to lobby state legislators to increase funding for financial aid.

"It was a very fun experience, a very productive experience and empowering," she says. "I feel like we now have more students on campus who are aware of how our government affects them on an individual level."

Liz Roosa Millar, ASI executive director, says that Greenberg looks at things through a social justice lens – a fact that is reflected in her leadership style.

"One of the unique things about Jenny is she has a level of compassion and empathy that you don't always see in a student leader," Roosa Millar says. "She's very selfless and humble. It's not

about Jenny. It's not about the ASI president. It's about serving the needs of the students."

As students meet with influential politicians in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., they are learning invaluable leadership skills that aren't directly taught in the classroom, Roosa Millar says.

"She's got a level of patience. She listens intently, and she knows when to speak and get her platform. But she doesn't do it by speaking over people. She doesn't do it by taking the gavel. When she does speak, it's powerful."

Greenberg credits the encouragement she received early on to become a student advocate for enabling her to run for president and to put her desire to help others front and center.

"The biggest thing I gained was being supported by others and learning how to support others," she says. "As people encouraged me to do more, I wanted to be able to do the same thing for others."

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