San Diego City College offering a certificate in Sustainable Urban Agriculture

By Staff Reports
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San Diego City College is now offering a certificate in Sustainable Urban Agriculture, the first of its kind in Southern California. Two classes will be offered this fall including Principles in Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Agricultural Practices. Students can expect to learn the fundamentals of sustainable agriculture both in the classroom and also at Seeds at City, the college’s very own urban farm.

Under the care of farmers Paul Maschke and Julia Dashe, eight student apprentices, and various volunteers, Seeds at City has grown to become a verdant and healthy ¾ acre farm where crops are sold on campus every Tuesday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the student-run Farmer’s Market.

Seeds at City Urban Farm began in 2008 and has continued to be a strong presence on campus. Apprentices and volunteers work on the farm Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays and work together four hours a week to cultivate the urban farm that is unlike any other garden in the city of San Diego. “This is going to stay with me for the rest of my life,” says apprentice Anthony Sanchez, who says he’s learned invaluable lessons about the way organic food is grown and harvested. He adds, “The idea and practice of sustainable agriculture is pretty simple: growing and harvesting produce locally, farmers and students alike are unrestricted by the amount of land available and learn to develop techniques that show respect for the soil and subsequently produces quality food.”

“The goals of Seeds is to establish education about sustainable agriculture and to inspire students,” says apprentice Marco Hernandez who takes turns with his fellow students tending the farmer’s market, selling fresh produce like kale, yellow tomatoes, and carrots among other harvested crops. The program works in partnership with Roots Sustainable Food Project, San Diego High School, and Garfield High School. As a part of the apprentice program, students visit other functional farms including Victory Gardens San Diego.

Most importantly, Seeds has volumes to teach about the community, not only on campus but the surrounding community. “Seeds has taught students that they can work around the confines of their dorms or apartment buildings,” says volunteer Taylor Lamore. “They inspect the importance within each student of knowing exactly what you’re putting into your body.”

Likewise, everything in the garden is natural and recycleable like the compost students use to fertilize the soil. Pesticides don’t even enter into the equation. For example, most bugs are tolerated if not completely welcome. Their presence is all a part of the continuing community and even a point of fascination. “The other day we found a bug I haven’t even seen before,” says Sanchez, remarking on the appearance of a green tomato worm. In fact, as he leaves the farm, farmer Paul called Julia to show her an insect he had never seen before.

“You can grow it all here,” says Sanchez, as he surveys the farm, “all you need is diversity.” A fitting metaphor for City College’s student and teacher efforts to continually move forward, in ideas that involve both the campus and the community.

Anyone is welcome to come and volunteer at Seeds and a workshop on food preservation is being offered August 28th from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Seeds at City Urban Farm located at City College campus. For more information visit www.seedsatcity.com.