Professor Terry Jones Named State’s Top Social Worker

Professor Terry Jones, Chair of the College of Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences’ Department of Social Work, has been named “Social Worker of the Year” by the California Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). He is co-principal investigator of a state-sponsored grant to investigate the disparities in group home utilization by African American youth in San Francisco. In 2002 he was co-principal investigator in the state-sponsored research project, “Funding California’s Group Homes: Services and Homes for Children.” His research in social policy, affirmative action, race, racism, and multicultural perspectives in higher education plays a major role in keeping his teaching on the cutting edge of new policy debates and developments.

“I’m humbled, surprised, shocked by the honor,” says Professor Jones, who was nominated by University President Norma Rees for the NASW award, and who is now in consideration for the national title.

When Professor Jones returned to his native Vallejo in the mid-1960s with a Bachelor’s Degree in History he quickly realized that blacks weren’t being hired for the teaching positions he sought. Instead, he got involved in social action and the juvenile justice system, attracting the attention of University of California, Berkeley graduate school recruiters who eventually convinced him to pursue higher education.

Now in his 31st year at Cal State East Bay, he has no regrets. “The Beauty of teaching is you don’t know how many people you’ve influenced in positive ways.” Social Work, he says, is one of the places where you can deal with social justice – poverty, racism – and attempt to empower people and make society what it ought to be, to help poor people see their strength in positive ways.

Professor Jones counts Project YES (Youth Experiencing Success), an enrichment program serving low-income minority youth in Richmond, as his greatest accomplishment. Other programs of this kind start with 16-17-year-olds – too late according to research showing social and educational problems beginning in the fourth grade. YES, alone, provides a concentrated, one-week math, science, computer, and literature jump-start on the CSUED campus the summer between third and fourth grade, plus a personal tutor for 20 hours per week the following year.

“We know the program is good. The students get a shock dose of the University environment; the tutor’s attention gives them a sense of importance. A measurement tool shows YES participants have improved attendance and social skills. We hope to see an academic spurt, as well,” says Professor Jones.

His only lament is that YES can never be large enough to accommodate the need. Perhaps 90 percent of Richmond’s in-coming fourth graders cannot be accommodated, and there are continual calls for YES programs in such communities as Oakland and Pinole.

Professor Jones presently chairs the National Education Association’s Human and Civil Rights Committee and, at CSUEB, the African American Faculty and Staff Association. His current research interests include the juvenile justice system, urban issues, the child welfare system, African American families, affirmative action, and racism and oppression. A member of NASW and of the Council on Social Work Education, he serves on the editorial boards of Thought in Action and the Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare. He’s also the four-time recipient of the African American Graduation Celebration Committee’s Outstanding Faculty Award, and was president for four years of the Statewide California Faculty Association Union.