

Camps send kids SAILing to higher ed



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A group of campers participate in interactive education.

By **ERIN JONES**
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As the year's end draws near, many Springfield High School students scramble to

study for final exams, apply for scholarships, and make plans for Spring Break. For some, it's also time to consider plans after high school graduation. Things like: "What careers interest me?" or "Financially, is

college even an option?" Questions that might quicken a high schooler's heart rate.

The Summer Academy to Inspire Learning (SAIL) is a University of Oregon outreach program for high school students in the Springfield, Bethel, 4J and Creswell school districts. The one-week day camps allow students to experience real college classrooms, explore campus, and rub elbows with professors. Students pick their camp of choice, from psychology to journalism, even German and Scandinavian studies. They are also taught about four-year college enrollment requirements and types of available financial aid. SAIL's mission is to "inspire students to pursue higher education," regardless of the obstacles that may stand in their way. Although the program's main focus is on lower income students, any high school students who might be interested in attending college may apply.

"We believe that a higher

education is a right, not a privilege," says Lara Fernandez, Executive Director for SAIL. Fernandez has always been interested in helping underprivileged teens, evident in her previous work at a shelter for battered women near Los Angeles. She also worked for an organization helping teens with criminal backgrounds, and directed the City Kids to Wilderness Project, which allows inner-city teens to experience nature firsthand. Fernandez's love for humanitarian organizations stems from her parents, who have backgrounds in education. Fernandez joined SAIL in 2009 and works tirelessly to expand the program. Along with her own three children, Fernandez—with a small and effective staff—oversees up to 300 students in the program's summer camps and mentorship program.

Despite its name, SAIL extends throughout the school year with its academic mentorship program, which is cur-

rently under development. This program allows select camp counselors to stay in touch with the students throughout the school year and help them with activities such as college applications, scholarships, and resumes. Danny Luskin, a student at the University of Oregon and a college mentor in the program, says it's nice for the kids to interact with college students because of the small age gap between them.

Although SAIL is still a fairly new program, it has already proven to have a positive effect on many teens' lives. Fifteen SAIL alumni are currently attending the University of Oregon, and many more are at other four-year colleges, trade schools, or have joined the military. The program hopes to expand by doubling the number of students and creating more camps with more academic faculty.