In the Shadow of Prosperity

Silicon Valley is internationally known for its start-up companies, venture capitalists, and entrepreneurial spirit. Successful high-tech companies like Facebook, Google, and Apple have created thousands of jobs and hundreds of new tech millionaires, but that’s only part of the story. In the shadow of this prospering region, communities such as San Jose’s Greater Washington area haven’t benefited from the tech boom. Lack of access to adequate education, health care, and support for business development and entrepreneurship, together with other issues of poverty and marginalization keep communities like Greater Washington from fully benefiting from the prosperity of the region.

More than one in five Greater Washington residents live below the poverty line, despite residing in the heart of one of the most expensive and prosperous metropolitan centers in the United States. Further, neighborhoods such as Greater Washington are often home to many recently immigrated families. For them, accessing education, skill-building resources, opportunity, safety, and health care can be particularly challenging. Thriving Neighbors responds to these challenges by working to build strong ties between the University and underserved communities with the goal of expanding educational choice and improving pathways to prosperity.

“Thriving Neighbors advances the mission that Santa Clara University has engaged throughout this valley for over 160 years: to build a more humane, just and sustainable world.”

— Michael E. Engh, S.J.
President
Santa Clara University
A History of Collaboration and Community Building in the Valley

Central to Santa Clara University’s Jesuit, Catholic values and 160-year identity is a commitment to creating a more just and equitable world. This tradition calls on the University to be both courageous and imaginative in finding new ways to partner with businesses, community leaders, and organizations to help improve the quality of life in the neighborhoods that make up its extended community. SCU gives meaning to this commitment by working with our most vulnerable community members to overcome barriers to social and economic inclusion.

This commitment and tradition has its earliest roots in the Santa Clara Community Action Program (SCCAP), which was founded nearly 50 years ago and continues to be an important presence in the community today. In the late 1960s, a program called “Project 50” was launched to introduce college life to 50 high-performing middle school students from underserved communities in San Jose. Many students who participated in the program are now alumni of SCU.
In 1985, the University expanded its outreach efforts again through the Arrupe Weekly Engagement Program. Originally known as the Eastside Project, the Arrupe Weekly Engagement Program promotes a more humane, just, and sustainable world through deeper understanding of and commitment to the local community. This program offers SCU students a tangible means to experience a process that challenges stereotypes, deepens the educational experience, and enriches the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual life of both communities.

Today, more than 1,200 students each year engage in transformative educational opportunities through one of 50 partnering community organizations. Students are provided with hands-on, real-world experiences, while building relationships with their community. Classes then reflect on what it means to be a global citizen in the 21st Century and experience the struggles and triumphs of the human spirit.

Initiatives like the Arrupe Weekly Engagement Program illustrate Santa Clara University’s commitment to partnering with local communities—a value integral to the University’s strategic plan and goal of deeper engagement with Silicon Valley. Thriving Neighbors is a continuation of this history and strategy.
Advancing a More Just and Equitable Silicon Valley

Thriving Neighbors is facilitated by the Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education, one of the University’s three Centers of Distinction. The Ignatian Center is charged with fostering the institution’s mission and core identity and providing leadership for the integration of faith, justice, and the intellectual life. The program’s initial focus is on the five, predominantly Latino neighborhoods that make up Greater Washington—Alma, Gardner, Goodyear, Tamien, and Washington. These neighborhoods are all located south of downtown San Jose and east of Guadalupe Parkway.

Collectively, these communities have both extraordinary assets and real challenges. Greater Washington is home to a driven and dedicated populace with a large immigrant population, strong community organizations, and seasoned community leaders. Conversely, it is also one of the most socioeconomically challenged regions of Santa Clara County, where families face significant barriers that impede their ability to live healthy and productive lives. Greater Washington’s constituent neighborhoods cope on a daily basis with poverty, high unemployment, and crime, including gang violence, prostitution, and drug trade.

SCU understands that the most successful community programs are those that grow organically. As such, a new, more open, and more inclusive community dialogue is vital to the success of Thriving Neighbors. A mutually led conversation will guide how the initiative leverages the University’s students, faculty, staff, and resources to work in collaboration with Greater Washington residents, businesses, community leaders, and organizations. Working together, this partnership will find innovative ways to build local capacity for entrepreneurship, expanded educational choice, healthy living, and more. The mutual learning opportunities presented by a partnership between SCU and Greater Washington will be essential to the success of Thriving Neighbors.
Beyond community impact, Thriving Neighbors also promises new, intangible benefits to the University community. SCU students will gain valuable, life-changing experiences and a deeper commitment to social justice, as they will be instrumental to everything Thriving Neighbors will do. Working with and through Thriving Neighbors, students will learn real-life skills beyond the campus borders, applying classroom lessons to real situations. These opportunities for nontraditional learning will serve and inspire students long after graduation as they grow to become Silicon Valley’s next generation of local and global leaders.

Thriving Neighbors presents an opportunity to address many of the challenges faced by the Greater Washington community. SCU recognizes the seriousness and complexity of interrelated social and economic issues that threaten to undermine the health and vibrancy of marginalized neighborhoods. At the same time, SCU also recognizes that a sense of community pride and a desire to improve social and economic conditions in these neighborhoods can be powerful catalysts for change.

Built upon two foundations—the University’s longstanding, demonstrated commitment to social justice and the desire and drive of neighborhoods like Greater Washington to create a stronger community—Thriving Neighbors is an important next step toward a more equitable Silicon Valley, where success and opportunity extend to even the most marginalized schools, neighborhoods, and communities.
What Thriving Neighbors Will Accomplish

Thriving Neighbors will bring SCU schools, departments, and community programs together with neighborhood residents, leaders, businesses, schools, non-profit partners, and government to create mutually beneficial, interconnected and multidisciplinary solutions.

In the first phase of Thriving Neighbors’ development, it will host programs aimed at reducing barriers to higher education and improving neighborhood prosperity. Simultaneously, the program will explore with community leaders and other organizations ideas about how best to use Santa Clara University’s resources in conjunction with others toward collaboratively solving urgent local challenges together.
As Thriving Neighbors expands its programming it will encompass numerous offerings including:

**Shared geography, experiences, values and objectives**

Serving as a hub of engagement for students and their families, Thriving Neighbors will seek a brick-and-mortar presence in Greater Washington. Over time, this center will also become a gathering place for sharing community knowledge and discovering pathways to innovative social change. It will be a place where community leaders and residents join faculty, staff, and students to probe challenges from multiple perspectives and sectors, while forming collective, collaborative solutions.

**Expanding educational choice**

Designed to make college a reality for all, the first phase of Thriving Neighbors in Greater Washington is the launch of a fourth- and fifth-grade academic enrichment program. The program builds on Washington Elementary School’s educational themes, while integrating science, technology, literacy, and California Common Core Standards into an 8-week, project-based, afterschool program. For its first cohort, the academic enrichment program invited 45 top-performing students of Washington Elementary School to continue on their quest for knowledge through hands-on learning activities that expand the walls of the classroom.
Prosperous businesses

The promise of Silicon Valley grows from its entrepreneurial spirit and creativity. To promote and support community entrepreneurship, the Leavey School of Business will consult with local businesses and implement workshops to build entrepreneurial skills. With time, the program aims to create more jobs, make businesses more sustainable, and improve the economic environment of the neighborhoods and communities targeted by Thriving Neighbors.

A healthy neighborhood

The health of local families and community members is inseparable from the health of their neighborhood. To support the general well-being of residents, SCU will explore collaborations in healthy living in the areas of food security, physical activity, and mental and physical health. We will work to improve access to healthy living resources through innovative partnerships and programs.

Opportunities for social justice education and SCU student involvement

Students at Santa Clara University learn more than just facts and figures. The Jesuit tradition emphasizes educating the whole person, and Thriving Neighbors will create opportunities for undergraduates to learn how they can be catalysts for positive change and social justice. Faculty and staff from the School of Education and Counseling Psychology, School of Engineering, Leavey School of Business, and Liberal Studies Department are already investigating new ways to involve their students.
Participate in Something Greater

SCU’s longstanding Jesuit, Catholic tradition of working to foster successful, healthy communities through programs like Thriving Neighbors is part of a deeply rooted institutional commitment to a more just and equitable world.

For our friends and supporters, Thriving Neighbors is a unique opportunity to give through Santa Clara to make a difference in underserved, marginalized Silicon Valley and regional neighborhoods—and participate in something greater than any individual effort. By working together as a community, we can develop academic, business, health, immigrant, and social resources to advance these neighborhoods into vibrant, healthy communities.

The University is turning to its closest friends and supporters, as well as members of its extended community and beyond, who share its commitment and passion for justice and equality—both collaboratively and philanthropically. There are a variety of partnership opportunities for impact that will shape this Santa Clara University initiative and help transform the future of communities in need in Silicon Valley.

Join us as we take a momentous next step in deepening Santa Clara’s commitment to, and partnership with, its community. For more information, please contact:

Jennifer Merritt
Director of Community-based Learning
Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education
Santa Clara University
408-554-5013 (phone)
jmerritt@scu.edu

Nicole Clawson
Associate Director for Development
Office of Development
Santa Clara University
408-554-4400 (phone)
nclawson@scu.edu