

# EDUCATION

## *Educating Tomorrow's Water Leaders*

**Sue McClurg** – *Water Education Foundation*

Established by the Water Education Foundation (WEF) in 1997, the William R. Gianelli Water Leaders Class is a year-long program that teaches young water professionals about current water issues, divergent viewpoints, and potential water resource solutions. In the past decade, 148 California, Arizona, and Nevada professionals from the engineering, water utility, legal, environmental, local government, legislative, and other water resource communities have completed the program.

Fifteen to 18 people are selected for each class after a competitive application process. Through WEF-sponsored water tours and briefings, class members work collaboratively on a report about a specific water-related topic. Previous classes have examined a variety of topics, from water conservation to the Endangered Species Act to flood management.

Participants learn much about these issues from their mentors, who are high-level water professionals. Each student is purposely paired with a mentor from an opposite point of view, for example, someone from an urban water agency would be assigned a mentor from the agricultural or environmental sector.

The class convenes at a January orientation where speakers from various sectors provide background information about current water issues, with a special focus on the research topic. Participants are expected to spend at least one day "shadowing" their mentor. Class members then work to prepare a final list of 20 detailed questions about the particular research topic and then interview their mentors in person, by telephone, or by email. Often, the professional relationship extends beyond the actual class assignment. Additional time commitments include attending WEF's 1-1/2 day executive briefing, two three-day water tours, and a summer meeting.

The mentor system, said Foundation Executive Director Rita Schmidt Sudman, not only helps preserve the institutional memory of historic water events but also helps students—and mentors—learn about a different viewpoint. "The fact that important people in the water and environmental world, from state and federal agency heads to congressional leaders, take time to meet and mentor these water leaders creates a memorable experience for these young people," Sudman said. "And the mentors seem to enjoy the responsibility and interaction."

Sudman and former Foundation Board Member Jean Auer were the driving forces behind the creation of the program. Auer, the first woman appointed to the California State Water Resources Control Board, served as class adviser from 1997 until her death in 2005.

Class members are selected based on their commitment to understanding water issues; interest in seeking leadership roles on public boards and commissions; commitment to the community through volunteer activities; and potential or existing opportunities for advancement within their own organizations.

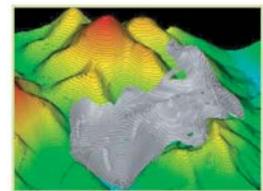
Funding for the class is provided by grants and a \$1,500 tuition fee, with some scholarships awarded. In 2002 former WEF Board President Bill Gianelli presented the foundation with a \$100,000 gift for the Water Leaders Program as an investment in the future. Gianelli served as assistant secretary for the Army in charge of the Corps of Engineers from 1981 to 1984 and Director of the California Department of Water Resources from 1967 to 1973.

Graduates give the program high marks: 90 percent say their ongoing relationship with class members has helped them in their own careers while 100 percent say they would recommend the class to a colleague. In 2004, an alumni organization was established to promote continued networking among graduates and fundraising to support the program. The organization raises funds through a silent auction conducted each year at the executive briefing.

*The Water Leaders Class runs on a calendar year. Contact Jean Nordmann, [jnordmann@watereducation.org](mailto:jnordmann@watereducation.org), or 916-444-6240, for an application for the 2008 class. Visit the Water Education Foundation at [www.watereducation.org](http://www.watereducation.org)*



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