



## Identifying, Engaging and Empowering the Next Generation of Progressive Leaders Through Young People For

In order to secure a lasting victory in the battle for America's future, we know we must identify, engage and empower the next generation of leaders committed to protecting our nation's core progressive values and our fundamental rights and freedoms. Right-wing foundations have long been aware that they must not only control contemporary public debate, but also foster the next generation of conservative scholars, journalists, government employees, legislators and activists. The progressive movement has not matched the growing presence of the Right on campuses and students are eager for the opportunity to join and lead a movement that works for the protection and advancement of our nation's core progressive values.

In 2004, People For the American Way Foundation (PFAW Foundation) has launched an innovative, long term initiative for young leaders to organize around progressive issues – **Young People For**. The core of Young People For is the annual Fellowship Program, which is designed to engage young

progressives in issues central to the movement, increase their effectiveness as leaders, and provide long-term support as they work to create social change on their campuses, in their communities, states, and across the nation. The 2005 Fellowship Class was chosen for their campus and community activism and leadership as well as for their commitment to progressive values. The first class of Fellows represents 40 colleges and universities in eight states – New York, California, Washington, D.C., Florida, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and Texas. In 2006, Young People For will reach out to 165 Fellows from 50 colleges in ten states (adding Minnesota and Pennsylvania) and will expand its program to two-year community colleges in New York and California.

Brought together for a National Summit in January 2005, the Young People For Fellows learned about progressive issues, how to effectively organize around them, and how to champion their message in their communities and in the media. The Fellows attended workshops and plenary sessions designed to broaden their progressive networks and cultivate their skills on messaging, media and communication, advocacy, research, organizing and mobilizing.



Young People For Fellow and 2005 Young People For Steering Committee Member, Paul David Perry, III, from American University asks a speaker a question at the 2005 National Summit

Each Fellow left the Summit with customized CD-ROM toolkits: a toolkit outlining progressive issues and talking points; a skills toolkit providing strategies for organizing on campus, connecting to media and advocating for issues; and a state-specific toolkit with information about state and local leaders, state-wide non-profit organizations and media outlets.

Following the National Summit, Young People For Fellows returned to their schools equipped with self-designed campus and state action plans. Young People For has been working with the Fellows to organize on and off campus to provide a new voice to the progressive movement. Throughout the year, speakers, trainers and Young People For Staff are visiting the campuses in the Fellowship Network, facilitate issues and skills trainings and convene community forums and events. The on-campus trainings provide an opportunity to educate and empower

progressive students and organizations, while the community forums help connect the Fellows to community members and local media.

**Young People For Fellows Take Action** Young People For Fellows attending the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), Lorena Jimenez, Diana Moreno and Ruben Vogt worked with UTEP's Center for Civic Engagement to organize a fellowship program for progressive high school students in the El Paso community. The fellowship program kicked off with a week-long training from June 12-17, 2005. The CYnergy (Civic Youth Energy) Fellowship Program selected 27 high school students as Fellows who participated in a series of events aimed at encouraging civic involvement and introducing students to public policy, non-profit organizations and local and national politics. In addition, the summit empowered the Fellows with skills trainings in media and public relations, public speaking, mobilization and organizing techniques.

After completing the summit, the CYnergy Fellows returned home to design and implement community service projects with the continued support and guidance of the Young People For Fellows and The Center for Civic Engagement.

Among the many activities organized by Lorena, Diana and Ruben, high school fellows attended city council meetings, met with local non-profit organizations and elected officials, engaged in ropes courses and sessions for reflection, and interned for a day with local community groups.

The summit engaged the fellows by focusing on local issues endemic to El Paso and encouraged students to work toward positive social change in their communities.

The city of El Paso, unique in many ways, is the second largest U.S. city to border Mexico with a total population of almost 700,000. El Paso boasts a Hispanic population of 77 percent. Seventy-one percent speak both Spanish and English in their homes in contrast to the 18 percent bilingual households in the nation. Economically, El Paso has a per capita money income of \$14,388, well below the national average of \$21,587. An unusually high 19 percent of El Paso families live below the poverty level, a number which is almost 10 percentage points higher than the national average of 9 percent.



PFAW Foundation Board Member, Alec Baldwin, meets with CYnergy Fellows in El Paso Texas. CYnergy was a creation of three Young People For Fellows based at the University of Texas at El Paso

The 2005 CYnergy Fellowship class accurately reflected the El Paso community. All of the 27 Fellows were bilingual and most were first or second generation Americans from Mexican immigrants families. The Fellows spoke about concerns of poverty, lack of employment opportunities and pervasive violence.

Young People For provided the CYnergy Fellowship with financial and organizational support for the summit and secured speakers to lead the workshops. Robert Nash, a media consultant for People For the American Way Foundation based in Austin, Texas, led two sessions, "Developing Strategic Media Plans" and "Communication and Public Speaking." Both sessions engaged students through interactive components, including video taping mock interviews with the fellows.

Jeff Johnson, Director of African American Outreach at People For the American Way Foundation led a training on "How to Motivate and Mobilize People," which addressed the fellow's interest in learning ways to galvanize support and energy in their high schools and communities around their issues.

Jorge Mursuli, Florida Director at People For the American Way Foundation and Shelley Utter, an advertising

designer and winner of the Cleo Challenge, co-led a discussion session on the First Amendment. Mr. Mursuli invited students to tackle the contentious and ambiguous concepts surrounding our First Amendment rights. Shelley Utter presented her campaign “Your First Amendment is Showing,” which won a national competition to increase young people’s awareness of the First Amendment. The presentation encouraged students to investigate their preconceptions about the First Amendment and think creatively about strategies to challenge infringements on constitutional rights to freedom of speech, freedom of press and freedom of religion.



PFAW Foundation Board Member Alec Baldwin addresses funders and friends of Young People For in El Paso, Texas at the El Paso Museum of Art

Acclaimed actor, activist and People For the American Way Board Member Alec Baldwin, met with the CYnergy Fellows in a private session to discuss local issues and connect these concerns to a national progressive message. Mr. Baldwin then led an open forum, entitled “A Conversation on a Progressive America,” which was attended by over 500 community members and press.

Following the open forum, People For the American Way Foundation hosted a reception to benefit the Young People For Fellows in Texas.

The UTEP Young People For Fellows did an incredible job planning, organizing and executing the first annual CYnergy Summit, greatly touching the lives of 27 local high school students and the larger El Paso community. In a creative, innovative approach, the Young People For Fellows successfully promoted a progressive agenda of civic engagement and positive social change by motivating and empowering the next generation of leaders and activists.

All across the country, Young People For Fellows are taking action on college campuses and in their communities. For more stories of young people working toward positive social change, please visit [www.youngpeoplefor.org](http://www.youngpeoplefor.org).

Click below for press surrounding the summit:

“Alec Baldwin to speak at UTEP” *El Diario*, June 10, 2005

[http://www.eldiariodigital.com.mx/semanales/looking\\_at\\_el\\_paso/nota.asp?notaid=9e1f1b7ec4c673bedea61d33f74a87aa](http://www.eldiariodigital.com.mx/semanales/looking_at_el_paso/nota.asp?notaid=9e1f1b7ec4c673bedea61d33f74a87aa)

“Actor Baldwin to bring ‘progressive’ ideas to UTEP tonight” *El Paso Times*, June 16, 2005

<http://www.elpasotimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050616/NEWS/506160338/1001>

“Actor urges activism—Baldwin tells 450 to learn many issues” *El Paso Times*, June 17, 2005

<http://www.elpasotimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050617/NEWS/506170369/1001>