General Education Seminar, Third Year Fellows, Assignment on Service Learning

“Real World Problem Solving”

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this paper is to outline ways to incorporate service learning/community-based learning into my fall 2013 Human Services Course 2307 Community Organization and Development. The goal for HUS 2307, a course which forms the foundation of my teaching, is to establish the grounding for the budding practitioner's subsequent social justice work.

**Assignment:**

Each student in HUS 2307 is assigned to work with a group to identify an issue or problem in the community. From here, they research the issue and draft a position statement about it. Students are required to document the facts (reliable sources only) they gathered about the issue/problem their group is studying to write a **position** **statement**  that convincingly articulates their stand on the issue. Each statement must include a request for a specific change and action by decision-makers**: to create something new, to improve something that already exists, or to support something that was initiated by others**. Students include a reference list (APA style) showing the resources used to prepare the statement. Throughout the process, students are asked to go out into the community to aid community groups moving forward with their change strategies.

**Methods**

In order to succeed, students are changed to go out into the community, ‘hang out,’ and get to the bottom of the issue, help out, offer a give back to the community, write up a group paper on their projects, and present on the lessons of the experience.

Student presentations on their projects should focus work completed. At minimum, **each presenter** should report on:

* + - 1. Methods and resources used to do the research
      2. Topics researched
      3. Interesting facts discovered
      4. How the research contributed to the group’s advocacy plan
      5. Summary of letter to elected official
      6. Conclusion based on excerpts from their reflection paper

**Use of Open Lab**

Each student group is to post their final group reports to the Open Lab.

**Teaching Updates:**

* Over time, this assignment has both changed and stayed the same. An emphasis on documentable give-back to the community is a benefit of the service learning approach now taken with the class.
* Students are changed to engage core General Education learning values and ethics, particularly around notions of **Community/Civic engagement.** In doing so, students: demonstrate social knowledge [regarding social, political, economic, and historical issues].
* Understand organizations and histories underlying government in global context
* Apply knowledge and analyze social, political, economic, and historical issues.
* Show ability to contribute actively by applying knowledge to the identification and analysis of societal and professional problems to enact solutions.

**High Impact Learning Practices**

* High impact learning practices including group work are used throughout the group project.

**Reflection on Learning from Community Projects :**

In the end, each student is asked to reflect on the learning process of their community project.The point of community projects, such as this is, to explore connections between communities and stories. In teaching community projects, students consistently report that their favorite part of the class is the class presentations, in which they share their findings and reflections on their projects. I have had students stand up and narrative their family histories as immigrants, connecting their stories with intricate gaps in immigration policy. Other students have stood up to talk about their experiences with losses to HIV/AIDS. Others have talked about their experiences with shifting conditions in neighborhoods. One group of students created a documentary film project, with interviews with activists at an anti-war march. Others saw a lack of green space in a neighborhood and created a community garden.

The core point of community projects is to help students to connect their own lives and practice with stories of social or economic justice. Here, just as students created a community garden, they create an experience in democratic living. Such social experimentation, innovation and possibility goes a long way. Mixing them together, organizers and practitioners draft their own chapter in a colorful history of practice. In doing so, they take their rightful place in the rich tradition of community practice I am fortunate enough to teach.