



University of Denver
Center for Community
Engagement &
Service Learning

Public Good E-Newsletter

Engaging campus and community for the public good.

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Issue 6

Editor: Jenny Whitcher, CCESL Associate Director

Director's Note: Opportunities for Social Justice

By: Eric Fretz, CCESL director

One of the things I like best about service learning and public good research is that they provide higher education an opportunity to work on social justice issues. I know that the term social justice is associated with left-wing politics, but I don't really see it that way. The pursuit of justice is an integral part to the democratic experiment and it's, frankly, an ideal that is fully integrated into the mainstream of our thought. Every morning, for instance, millions of children place their hands over their hearts and recite together, "with liberty and justice for all."

Service learning and public good research draw on the rich intellectual and practical traditions of social justice. For instance in their writings, Immanuel Kant, John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas, lay out theories of justice that have influenced the way justice is discussed and practiced inside and outside of higher education.

As I was reading through the articles in this issue of the Public Good Newsletter I was reminded that DU's commitment to service learning and the public good provides higher education professionals opportunities to experiment with and actualize the justice theories of some of our greatest thinkers. Through their research, teaching and community engagement initiatives Eugene Walls, Theresa Dokey and David Ciepley are all working to forward equity (Walls), public deliberation (Dokey) and our responsibility to others and the environment (Ciepley).

Service learning and public good research are methods that help us connect advanced theories and practical applications as they relate to social justice issues. The stories in this newsletter offer some powerful examples of both how it can be done and why it is important.

Our mission is to **educate, engage, and equip** the campus community to accomplish tangible, public work that improves the lives of people in our communities.



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What is your job and title at DU?

I am Eugene Walls and my title is assistant professor at the Graduate School of Social Work.

Tell me about your Public Good Project.

My current project is with the Colorado Anti-Violence Project. They have started a coalition of folks from different college campuses who are interested in transgender issues. This is a qualitative project to interview 30 trans-identified or gender-variant students, faculty, and staff in order to understand the barriers that they experience on campuses of colleges and universities in Colorado, and what needs to be done to bring them into the mainstream of the community.

What makes it "public good?"

When I think about public good, I think about a couple of things. The first are social justice goals that move towards greater liberation for groups that have historically been marginalized, disenfranchised and oppressed. Then the second important aspect is that the project needs to be defined by the community as a need to help them move their agenda forward.

How is your project impacting communities?

I've had about a year-and-a-half's worth of conversation with staff, faculty and students at multiple Colorado campuses. Folks are trans-identified and wanting to be able to document what actually happens to trans folks on college campuses. This documentation would give LGBTQ student services and trans allies information they can bring to the administration and say, "Okay, this is what's going on. If you're really committed to trans-inclusion then we want to address these issues."

How do you incorporate students into your PG project?

I train students on different aspects of community-based research, and they go out and they actually collect the data. For masters' level students the experience de-mystifies research and helps them see research can be an important part of community intervention. I try to get these students to be passionate about research so that they know how to use it, and hopefully inspire a few of them to go on and pursue doctoral education with this experience of having done community-based research.

The doctoral students that I work with are students who have interests that overlap my substantive area of research interest - issues related to equity for the LGBT community, but they are also students who methodologically want to do community-based research. I think the more that I can give them that experience, co-author with them, and help them get published in this arena, the more I'm laying that foundation for them to be able to do community-based research. When they hit the disincentives that exist in the academic world to not do community-based research they will already know it's possible and they will have a track record.

How is this project incorporated into your larger research agenda?

I do some theoretical work on modern prejudice that's really not community-based

(the Public Good interview, Continued from p. 2)

research. However, substantively this project connects back to my larger research agenda because it's about the ways in which people have lived experiences of oppression. So this public good project really bridges from the theoretical aspect of my work to the applied, lived experience.

What else would you like to tell me?

I don't think it's news to anyone that there are disincentives in academia to doing community-based research. CCESL and the public good funds have helped me more fully become who I profess to be. I have a goal of how I see myself as a scholar, and there are a lot of disincentives for the scholar model I embrace. Public good is the motivating force that helps me push through those disincentives and to realize the vision of who I would like to be as a scholar, especially from a pre-tenured position.

Public Good Student Project

By: Teresa Dokey, sophomore



My name is Teresa Dokey and I am a sophomore pursuing a degree in Global Studies. Working in partnership with the Denver Center for International Studies (DCIS), a Denver Public School serving a racially and socio-economically mixed student body with interests in international and cross-cultural affairs, I have implemented a program to educate youth about various cultures through foreign films in order to promote cultural understanding. I am excited about this program because it is related to my academic field of study and career path, working

for a government agency or international non-profit organization in the cultural diplomacy arena.

With a grant graciously provided by the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CCESL), and the support of my faculty mentor, Associate Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Susan Sterett, to date we have screened two films:



the French film *The Class*, about a culturally diverse student body from a tough Parisian neighborhood, and the Danish film *Fighter*, about a high school student with interests that conflict with the beliefs of her Turkish immigrant parents.

In the spring, the Center for Judaic Studies has kindly agreed to sponsor a screening of the German film *The Wave*, about a high school teacher's unorthodox experiment to show his students how Hitler inspired a nation to follow his lead.

Exposing America's youth to foreign films is a highly effective tool to promote cultural understanding. Because American films and television shows dominant the world market, students abroad are familiar with American culture while American students have little to no knowledge about foreign cultures.

In the future, I would like to expand the program by: (1) having the students at DCIS create a foreign film review which they can post on the Internet so that students from

(the Public Good student project, Continued from p. 3)

high schools across the nation can access the information in hopes of screening the film(s) at their school and, (2) aligning DCIS with a high school in each film's country of origin so that the students could have a Skype discussion with their foreign counterparts about the film's subject matter.

My hope is that by exposing DCIS' youth to cultures abroad via foreign films, they will not only gain more knowledge, understanding and acceptance about cultures that are different than their own, but they will also grow to become more civic-minded adults from having learned more about the world in which they live.

As illustrated above, I would love to get more schools involved domestically and abroad. For more information about the program or to make foreign film recommendations, please contact me at, tdokey@du.edu.

Service Learning Course Spotlight

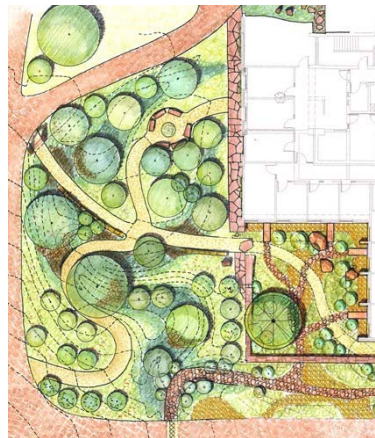
By: David Ciepley, Political Science



In the Fall of 2009, I taught a Service Learning First Year Seminar, "Living Off the Grid." The "grid" refers to the electrical power grid and, by extension, our broader infrastructure of transportation, communication, water, sewer, and food distribution. It is one of the wonders of human invention and investment, the spine of civilization. Yet every year, thousands of Americans make a voluntary decision to remove themselves partially, or wholly, from it in an effort to live more sustainably.

Readings for this course informed students of the environmental consequences of our conventional lifestyles "on the grid," and examined how today's off-grid pioneers manage to heat, cool, and power their homes, harvest rainwater for home use, and grow much of their own food in a self-sufficient, sustainable manner.

The service learning component of the course involved work in DU's new Permaculture Garden (<http://dugardens.org/>), adjacent to Cherrington Hall. "Permaculture" (a contraction of "permanent agriculture") is an advanced gardening technique that uses perennial food producers (fruit trees, berry bushes, fruiting vines, perennial vegetables) to generate large amounts of food without large amounts of money or labor by mimicking the productivity and self-management of natural ecosystems, in which plants are grouped in symbiotic relationships.



The community being served was in this case the DU community itself. First, the Garden is a demonstration site for students, faculty, staff, and all visitors who take our campus tour, of how much food can be produced in a sustainable and aesthetically pleasing manner within the confines of a typical suburban yard. It is also the hub of a growing web of faculty and student groups interested in teaching or learning about various components of sustainable agriculture. Further, it is being closely watched by the university administration as a possible model for future landscaping on campus. It may also eventually provide items of food for use in the student dining halls.

(the Service Learning Course Spotlight, Continued from p. 4)

Work undertaken by students in the class included contouring the land to catch water runoff from the nearby roof, building pathways, improving the soil with nitrogen-fixing cover crops and layers of mulch and compost, and planting over two dozen fruiting trees and bushes - the "anchor" elements around which "helping" plants will later be planted.



The decision to make this a service learning course was easy, as it provided an opportunity for students to put into practice what they were learning in the classroom, while also adding to the sustainability resources on campus. But all service learning courses come with extra logistical work, so I was very grateful to have the enthusiastic and capable assistance of Erin

Hough, a third-year Biology major and Service Learning Associate (<http://www.du.edu/ccesl/sla.html>) funded by CCESL. Also, students occasionally grouse about the "constantly changing syllabus" that is par for the course with service learning where the shifting needs of one's community partner, or even the weather, can force rescheduling and improvisation. I therefore found it useful to cultivate an ethos of flexibility in the name of service from the very outset. Teaching this course was one of my best teaching experiences at DU, and one I hope to build on in the future.

Service Learning Associates

Faculty who integrate service learning into their courses know that service learning often takes more time and effort than teaching a typical course. In response to this need, CCESL has developed a program to support faculty who provide students with valuable community-based experiences tied to classroom learning.

The Service Learning Associates (SLA) program is designed to put students and faculty into working relationships that effectively support and utilize community-based partnerships in learning. To do this, we pair DU students who have completed a service-learning course with faculty members teaching at least one service-learning course.

SLAs are students who collaborate with faculty to provide support in the preparation and hands-on work required for service learning classes. SLAs may contribute by building and enhancing relationships with community partners, serving as an on-site liaison at the partner location, or they may lead critical reflection sessions and assist with classroom activities. Some SLAs may even help develop syllabi, course materials, and evaluation strategies.

Currently CCESL is seeking both faculty who are interested in working with an SLA student, and recommendations of students for SLA positions.

Please contact Sarah McCauley at sarah.mccauley@du.edu or 303.871.3627:

- 1) If you are teaching a service learning course this spring 2010, or during the upcoming 2010-2011 academic year and would like assistance.
- 2) If you know a student who has taken a service-learning course, displays leadership among their peers, demonstrates strength in both personal and academic reflection, and shows potential for expanded service-learning roles in partnership with faculty.

Conference Announcements

2010 International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE) Conference

www.researchslce.org

Theme: International Perspectives: Crossing Boundaries through Research

Where: Indianapolis, IN

When: Oct. 28-31, 2010

Application Deadline: March 22, 2010

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health 11th Conference

www.ccph.info

Theme: Creating the Future We Want to Be: Transformation through Partnerships

Where: Portland, OR

When: May 12-15, 2010

Registration Deadline: April 30, 2010

Western Regional Campus Compact Continuums of Service Conference

www.wacampuscompact.org

Theme: Vision, Courage, Leadership: Engagement to Strengthen Communities

Where: Portland, OR

When: March 31-April 1, 2010

Registration Deadline: March 12, 2010

If you have story ideas for the Public Good E-Newsletter

please contact:

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