It can sometimes seem difficult to connect higher education’s theoretical stance with hands-on work experience. For students who want to serve their communities, it is often assumed they must study an explicitly service-oriented field or be involved in extracurricular activities to volunteer their time. However, each area of study has the ability to include social responsibility in its curriculum, and many departments across the university create opportunities to become involved in the community through experiential learning.

For the Spring 2015 Strategic Communications Seminar class in the department of Media, Film & Journalism Studies, students were pleasantly surprised to find that their quarter-long class would solely focus on serving as the public relations agency for Slow Food Denver (SFD), putting into action part of DU’s mission to have “active partnerships with local and global communities” and to “contribute to a sustainable common good”.

Since 1986, the Slow Food movement originating in Italy has been fighting against the industrialization of food and food culture. A non-profit organization, Slow Food works to create public awareness, promote biodiversity, preserve food traditions, advocate for local farmers and producers, and promote a sustainable and community-based food culture. SFD has been part of the movement since 2001, and was the innovator behind what is now a nation-wide ‘Seed to Table’ school garden program. Most importantly, as Krista Roberts, Executive Director of Slow Food Denver, states: “We believe in the power of food to heal and nourish our communities.”
Director of the Slow Food Denver chapter stresses, “We really see ourselves as educators focused on changing the food system – with joy and justice”.

Students in the seminar class, led by Professor Erika Polson, spent the first half of the course conducting research and working on campaign ideas for increasing involvement and membership in the organization. Halfway through the quarter, two student teams presented their respective campaign plans to SFD. Based on client feedback, students further developed campaigns and worked on the execution of their ideas, the culmination of which was presented at the end of May to the entire SFD board at the organization’s office, located in The Source – an artisanal food market in Denver’s River North District.

The primary directive for the students is to find ways to engage members of the Denver community to become involved with an organization that exemplifies food values already thriving in Colorado, such as a passion for sustainable food, organic gardening, justice for food workers, and education about food production and policy issues.

Strategic Communication graduate student Kenny Morris said he appreciates the opportunity to leverage communication strategies for a project and organization that contributes meaningfully to our collective community. “This class gives us the ability to not only learn new things, but also to apply these lessons to real world scenarios.”

Learn more about DU’s [BA, Strategic Communication](#) and [MS, Strategic Communication](#).